



# Soviet Russia

*Some Random Sketches  
and Impressions*

*By*

Jawaharlal Nehru

ALLAHABAD LAW JOURNAL PRESS  
ALLAHABAD



*First printing—December, 1928*

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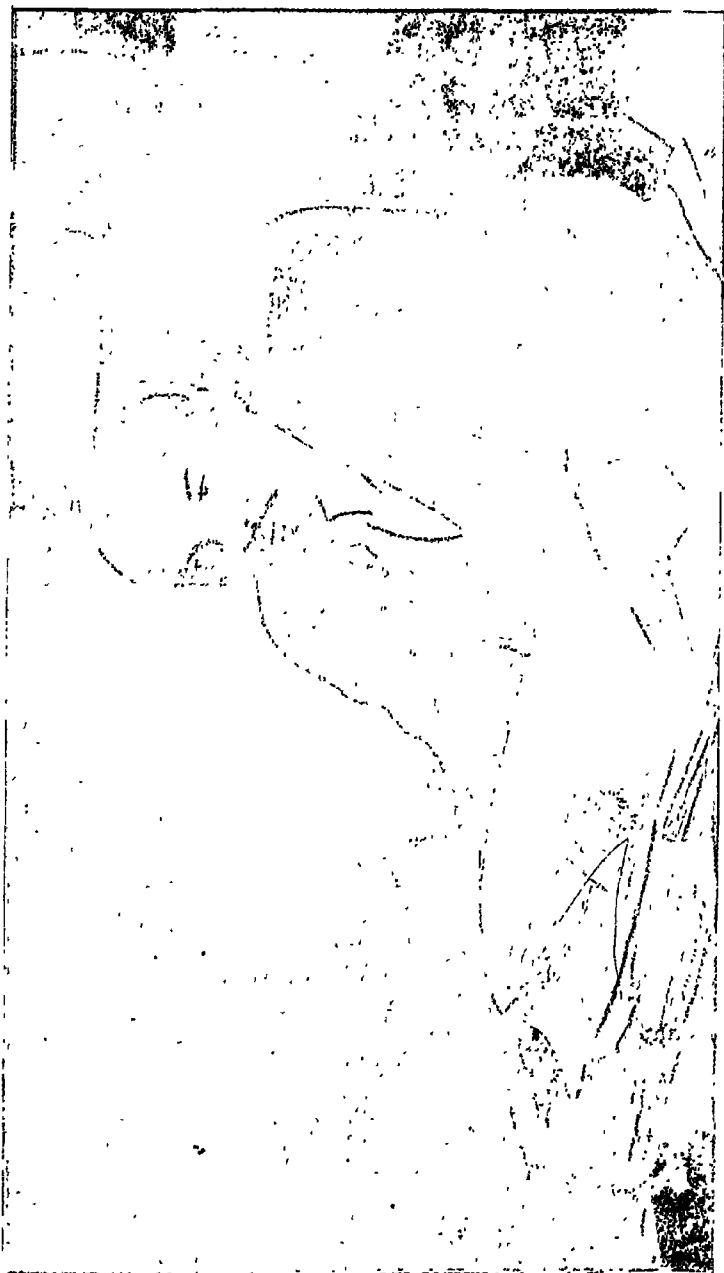
*Printed and Published by  
K. P. Dar at the Allahabad Law Journal Press  
Allahabad*



“Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven.”







Lenin

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## FOREWORD

These articles were contributed to various newspapers in India. Most of them appeared in the "Hindu" of Madras, the one on "Education" appeared in "Young India" and some have appeared in other papers. I am having them issued in book form with considerable hesitation. I realise, more perhaps than the average reader, their deficiencies and how disjointed and sketchy they are. Some of them, may I confess it, were written in railway trains, and all have been sandwiched into the intervals between other activities which absorbed most of my time. I am also fully aware that it requires a person of considerable knowledge and some courage to write about the complex and ever changing conditions of Soviet Russia. I claim no such knowledge and though I may possess the habit of rushing in where wiser people fear to tread, I do not claim to lay down the law about Russia or to dogmatise about anything that has happened there. I have found the study of Soviet conditions an absorb-

## FOREWORD

ing one, and from the numerous enquiries that I have received, it is clear that many others hunger for information about them. This patchwork series of articles, with many omissions and repetitions, based on a little personal knowledge and more on the reading of books, will hardly satisfy that hunger. But perhaps it may answer a few questions and point, to those who wish to pursue the subject further, the path of fuller knowledge. Hence my temerity in offering this little book to the public.

Woodrow Wilson in his address to the Congress on December 17th, 1917, said: "You catch with me the voices of humanity that are in the air. They grow daily more audible, more articulate, more comprehensive, and they come from the hearts of men everywhere." To the student of modern Russia it is these voices of humanity that come, the cry of the undistinguished masses, ever louder and more insistent, and it seems to him that echoes answer from every country. A war weary world heard these voices in 1917. President Wilson heard them. Outlining his famous Fourteen Points—alas, where are they now?—he referred to the peace parleys between Soviet

## F O R E W O R D

Russia and Germany and said: "The Russian representatives have insisted, very justly, very wisely and in the true spirit of modern democracy that the conferences they have been holding with the Teutonic and Turkish statesmen, should be held with open not closed doors. And all the world has been audience, as they desired. .... There is, moreover, a voice calling for the definitions of principle and of purpose, which is, it seems to me more thrilling and more compelling than any of the more moving voices with which the troubled air of the world is filled. It is the voice of the Russian people. .... They call to us to say what it is we desire, in what if in anything our purpose and spirit differed from theirs; and I believe that the people of the United States would wish me to respond with utter sincerity and frankness. Whether their present leaders believe it or not it is our heartfelt desire and hope that some way may be opened whereby we may be privileged to assist the people of Russia to attain their utmost hope of liberty and ordered peace." And the sixth of the Fourteen Points was to be the acid test for the powers:

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“The evacuation of all Russian territory and such a settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unembarrassed and unhampered opportunity for the independent determination of her own political and national policy, and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing, and, more than a welcome, assistance of every kind that she may need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good will, of their appreciation of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.”

These were generous words. But even the author and his own country failed to live up to them. And history shows us the result of this acid test and how the “sister nations” have, instead of giving sympathy and good will, ceaselessly sought to hamper and destroy the new Russia. Today, ten years after the war, how far we are from an open diplomacy can be seen from the recent

## FOREWORD

secret Anglo-French Naval Pact. But Russia has survived because she had the "voices of humanity" with her.

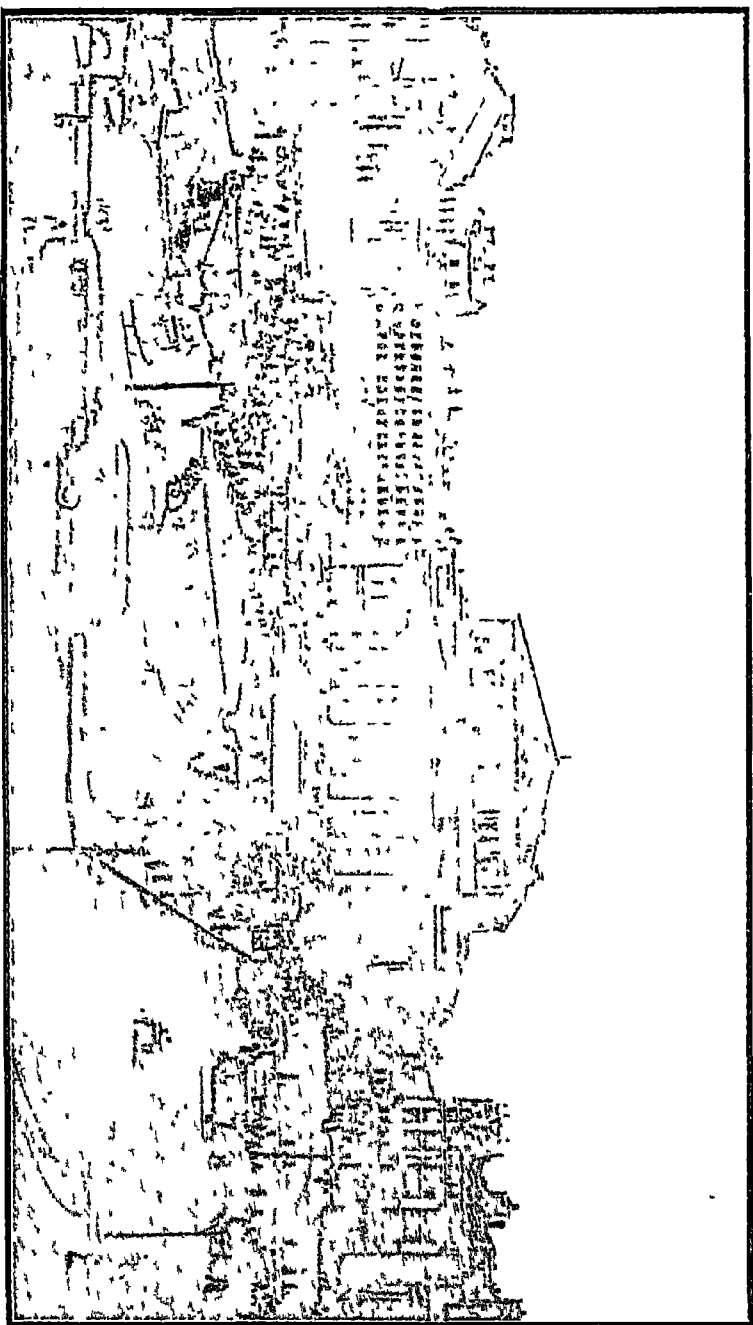
I am grateful to the editors of the various periodicals in which these articles have appeared for their courteous permission to reprint them. I am specially grateful to the editors of the "Hindu" and "Young India." At the insistence of my friend the publisher some illustrations of his choosing have been included. They bear little relation to the text, but they may perhaps be appreciated by some of those who are venturesome enough to possess themselves of a copy of this book.

JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

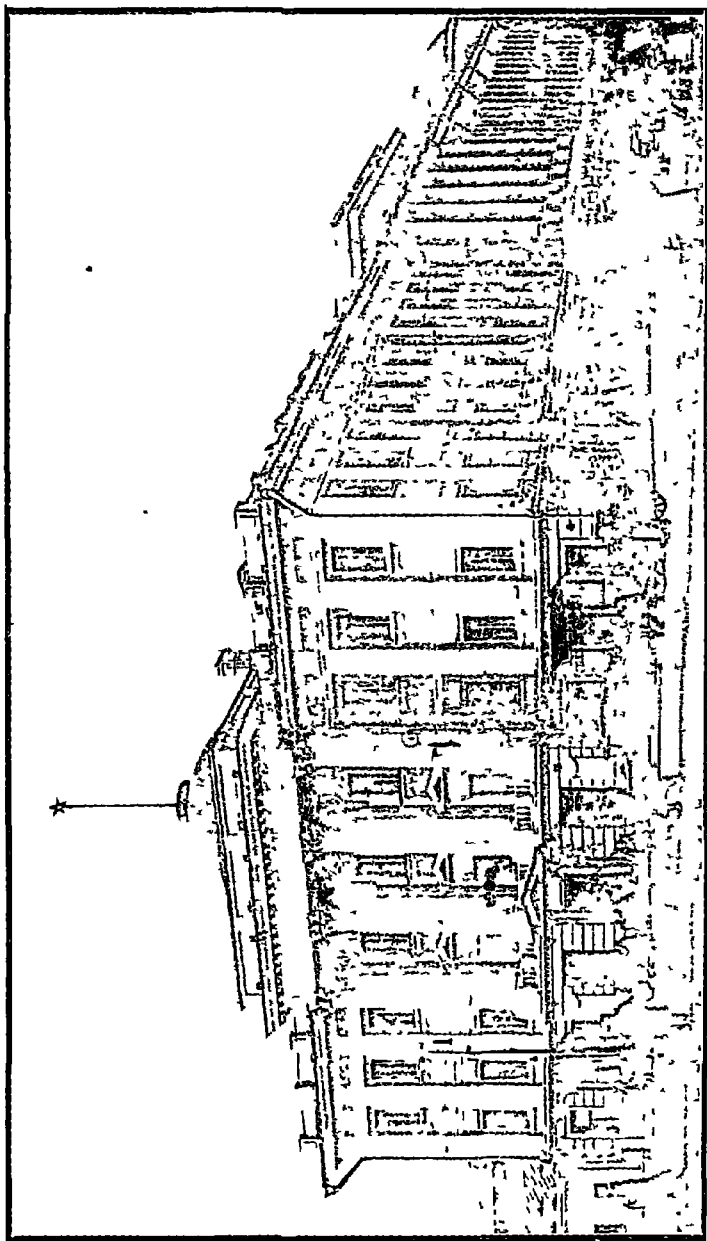
ALLAHABAD

*October 10th, 1928*





The Sverdloff Square, facing Theatre



The Trade Union Hall, Moscow

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CHAPTER I

THE FASCINATION OF RUSSIA

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## CHAPTER I

### THE FASCINATION OF RUSSIA

Since my return from Europe I have frequently been asked about Russia. On the strength of a very brief visit to Moscow I have been treated almost as an expert on Russia and all manner of questions have been put to me, often to my great embarrassment. When asked to speak, specially at student gatherings, the subject suggested has almost invariably been Soviet Russia. In spite, however, of limited knowledge of the subject I have gladly responded, for I have welcomed this spirit of enquiry and this interest in a country which has many points of contact with ours, and which has launched on one of the mightiest experiments in history. All the world is watching her, some with fear and hatred, and others with passionate hope and the longing to follow in her path.

It is difficult to feel indifferent towards Russia, and it is still more difficult to judge of her achievements and her failures im-

partially. She is today too much of a live wire to be touched without a violent reaction, and those who write about her can seldom avoid superlatives of praise or denunciation. Much depends on the angle of vision and the philosophy of life of the observer; much also on the prejudices and pre-concieved notions which he brings to his task. But whichever view may be right, no one can deny the fascination of this strange Eurasian country of the hammer and sickle, where workers and peasants sit on the thrones of the mighty and upset the best-laid schemes of mice and men.

For us in India the fascination is even greater and even our self-interest compels us to understand the vast forces which have upset the old order of things and brought a new world into existence, where values have changed utterly and old standards have given place to new. We are a conservative people, not over-fond of change, always trying to forget our present misery and degradation in vague fancies of our glorious past and an immortal civilisation. But the past is dead and gone and our immortal civilisation does not help us greatly in solving the problems of today.

If we desire to find a solution for these problems we shall have to venture forth along new avenues of thought and search for new methods. The world changes and the truths of yesterday and the day before may be singularly inapplicable today. We have to follow the line of life in its ever-varying curves and an attempt to adhere rigidly to an outworn creed may take us off at a tangent from this curve of life and lead us to disaster.

Russia thus interests us because it may help us to find some solution for the great problems which face the world today. It interests us specially because conditions there have not been, and are not even now, very dissimilar to conditions in India. Both are vast agricultural countries with only the beginnings of industrialisation, and both have to face poverty and illiteracy. If Russia finds a satisfactory solution for these, our work in India is made easier.

Russia again cannot be ignored by us because she is our neighbour, a powerful neighbour which may be friendly to us and co-operate with us, or may be a thorn in our side. In either event we have to know her and understand her and shape

## SOVIET RUSSIA

our policy accordingly. The bogey of war with Russia is ever with us. In the days of the Tsar we were told that Russian imperialism wanted an outlet to the sea; now that the Tsar has gone we are warned against the insidious attempts of communists to subvert a peaceful and well-ordered world. The old political rivalry between England and Russia continues, whoever may occupy the seats of power in Whitehall or in Moscow or Petrograd. How far must India inherit this rivalry or be made to suffer from it? There are rumours and alarums of war and the problem is an urgent one for us.

It is right therefore that India should be eager to learn more about Russia. So far her information has been largely derived from subsidised news agencies inimical to Russia and the most fantastic stories about her have been circulated. The question most frequently asked of me has been about the alleged nationalisation of women! The most prolific suppliers of news about Russia have been the Riga correspondents of British and others newspapers. A writer in the New York "Nation" described recently how Riga correspondents are made.

He wrote as follows :

" The first time I served as a Riga correspondent was in London. An editor made a correspondent of me by giving me an editorial leader clipped from one of the morning papers. He instructed me to re-cast part of it in the form of a dispatch and date it from Riga. The editorial was one reviewing in some detail the pernicious activities of the Third International. I must have re-written it rather well, for later I was entrusted with other tasks of the same delicate nature. I became the paper's regular Riga correspondent—"from our own correspondent", as they like to say in Fleet Street.

" A year later I was in Paris and attached to a newspaper there. And in Paris I found myself again a Riga correspondent. The work was twofold now. There were French journals and English journals to re-write. All of them, including the one in London which formerly employed me, seemed to boast Riga correspondents. In all their dispatches there were revelations—Bolshevist atrocities, Cheka executions, Soviet economic difficulties, dissatisfaction of the people with the Government. As in London, this material was turned over to me; and out of the mass another composite Riga correspondent was born.

" Whenever I think of Riga now I do not visualize a city, but a newspaper office—old desks, paste-pots shears, typewriters, waste paper. Riga is a newspaper office city. It may have a geographic location. For all I know it may be populated with individuals absorbed in their own affairs; eating well, sleeping well, dreaming of owning automobiles.

You cannot prove it by me. Once, in a moment of inexcusable curiosity, I went to the trouble of hunting up Riga in the Encyclopædia Britannica. That fount of current information describes it as a thriving port on the Baltic Sea, from which agricultural products, chiefly oats, are exported to England. Obviously, it was an old edition of the Encyclopædia. By this time the rumours far outnumber the oats.

If cities ever receive decorations for signal service, the Western world should confer prime honours upon Riga. By its mere existence as a four-letter word used for a dispatch date-line it has served as a barrier against the plots of the Soviets, thus keeping sacred and inviolate the idealism of Western Europe. Riga defends the world against the insidious propaganda of the Soviets. Red lies break against its intrepid front."

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## CHAPTER II

### THE JOURNEY

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## CHAPTER II

### THE JOURNEY

We had been invited by the Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries to visit Moscow during the tenth anniversary celebration early in November, 1927. A very large number of invitations had been issued to men and women in all countries—not only to communists but to many professors, scientists and distinguished individuals. I believe between seven and eight hundred persons responded to these invitations. Our own visit was decided upon at the last moment as we had little time to spare and the journey to Moscow was a long one.

We went from Berlin and crossed the whole of Poland. It was an uneventful and dreary journey. Poland looked a desolate and dismal country. Except for Warsaw, the stations were small way-side buildings with very few houses in the neighbourhood. Our German conductor in the train had the supremest contempt

for Poland and all things Polish. For him civilisation ended at the German frontier and the Poles were a barbarous people. It may be however that the cheerless aspect of the country was due to the season; it was the beginning of winter. But even winter could not have made much difference to an industrial country, and from what we could see from the train there were few evidences of industrialism.

We reached the Russian frontier at Niegeroloje on the night of November 7th, 28 hours after leaving Berlin. Just before our arrival we were visited in our compartment by a Russian officer in charge of the customs. He asked us if we were going to the celebrations as guests, and assuring himself of this, he told us not to worry about our luggage as he would take charge of it. We were excused the customs examination.

The frontier station was all beflagged and decorated. There were red flags everywhere and the Soviet emblem—the hammer and the sickle. There were also pictures and busts of Lenin and other leaders. It was the anniversary day, just ten years after the Bolsheviks seized power, and all Russia

was celebrating it.

We had already taken our dinner but the station staff produced large quantities of food and, after the Indian fashion, would have no refusal. We had to comply with their wishes. We had some difficulty in communicating with each other as the only European languages we could express ourselves in were English and French. The station staff knew no English whatever and exceedingly little French. Several knew German well. Ultimately a person was produced who could speak a little French and he became our interpreter. We had quite a little function; a speech of welcome was made to which I had to respond briefly. About a score of villagers were present—men; women and children—and they took great interest in the proceedings. Partly this may have been due to the *saris* of my wife and sister. We were then taken round the room and the pictures and posters were explained to us and we had our first experience of Lenin worship. Every mention of Lenin brought a rapt expression on the faces of those present. Our whole stay at this little wayside station resembled nothing so much, as my

father remarked at the time, as a visit of a Congress deputation to a small town or village during the non-co-operation days.

From Niegeroloje we travelled in the Russian train. Our berths had been reserved by our hosts and we had a very comfortable journey. There is only one class in Russia but they have some special sleeping cars and we had been provided with these. We travelled the whole night and the greater part of the next day, arriving at Moscow the next afternoon. All the stations *en route* were decorated with flags and pictures in honour of the anniversary. The men and women and children we saw at the stations were well clad and most of them had great coats reaching to their ankles and big Russian boots up to the knees.

At Moscow we found representatives of the Cultural Society to greet us as well as a number of Indian young men whom we did not know. Mr. S. J. Saklatvala, who had preceded us by a few days, was also there. We were taken to the Grand Hotel de Moscow in the Place de la Revolution, a large building with many evidences of former grandeur and luxury. But evidently

these signs of grandeur did not fit in with the present regime and were mostly covered up.

Our first feeling was of great regret that we had not come a day or two earlier. The real anniversary celebration had taken place the day before and we had missed it. This consisted of a march past the Lenin mausoleum of over a million troops and workers and children drawn from every part of Russia. Kalinin, the peasant president of the Russian Union, and still a peasant in his appearance in spite of his high office, had taken the march past. From early morning till night had fallen the march past continued to the strains of the Internationale, the workers' anthem; first the troops of all kinds and then representatives from factories and colleges and schools, and towns and villages. Workers and peasants, men and women and children, forty deep went by, with banners flying, head high and full of enthusiasm. Effigies there were of Chamberlain and Briand and Baldwin, some of them very clever. One of these showed Chamberlain wedged in a sickle with the hammer falling on his head. Finally, long after night had

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fallen the Cossack cavalry made a magnificent charge at break-neck speed right across the great Red Square. Such were the accounts that we heard and the more we heard them the more we regretted having missed this magnificent spectacle.

~~CHAPTER III~~  
~~IMPRESSIONS OF MOSCOW~~



## CHAPTER III

### IMPRESSIONS OF MOSCOW

The streets were full of people, mostly on foot. There were crowds everywhere, overflowing from the pavements to the middle of the streets, but they were orderly crowds obeying the law of the road and passing on ceaselessly without any jams or hold-ups. The police, or rather the militia men, as they are called, seemed to control the traffic well. Their task was not so difficult as it is in other great cities as the vehicular traffic was not great. There were many electric trams and motor buses, all crowded, and taxis and private cars, but altogether they made a poor show as compared with the vast numbers to be seen in Paris or Berlin or London. Probably the crowds were greater than usual owing to the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Soviet Republic.

The city was beflagged and decorated for these celebrations. There was the red flag everywhere and the sign of the

hammer and sickle, the symbol of the rule of the labourer and the peasant. Lenin's picture was often displayed and the figure X representing the ten years of the republic was also frequently seen. At night there were illuminations showing off these decorations and signs, and even the electric bulbs were usually red. The colour red is dear to the Russian—even apart from its revolutionary significance. The Russian word for it means both red and beautiful, and the famous Red Square in Moscow, skirting the Kremlin, with Lenin's mausoleum on one side of it, was so called even before the revolution.

The first impression of Moscow is almost that of any great city and yet as one proceeds differences are noticed and one arrives at the conclusion that Moscow stands apart from the cities of the west. It is beautiful with its innumerable golden domes and wide squares and broad streets. It is full of churches—some one told us that there used to be 1600 of them. Some of the bigger ones have been converted into museums but most of them are still open to the faithful. The Soviet Government does not encourage in any way

church-going or religion. Indeed there are organisations which carry on a vigorous anti-religious propaganda and education is wholly secular. But there are no restrictions in the way of people going to churches, and large numbers, specially from the country side, still visit them. Right near the Kremlin is an ancient chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary and its reputed holiness attracts people from far. We saw crowds, chiefly women, going in. There is no one to stop them, but none who pass that way can fail to see an inscription on an adjoining wall. In large letters, which stand out, is given a famous saying of Karl Marx: "Religion is the opium of the people."

No city in the west perhaps offers such a variety of costume and headgear as Moscow. Paris is supposed to be the greatest international centre of Europe. One comes across people from all countries there, but they are all in the standard costume of the west, almost the sole exception being Indian women who continue to wear their *saris*. But in Moscow Asia peeps out from every corner, not tropical Asia but the Asia of the wide steppes and the cold regions of

the north and east and centre. It has heavy boots on and every variety of long coat and hat. People have grown accustomed to these varieties and eccentricities of attire and pay little attention to them. Even the *saris* of my wife and sister, unusual as they were in Moscow, attracted less attention there than in Berlin or Paris.

But the real change one notices in Moscow, and which grows on one with every day's stay, is in the atmosphere and the very air of the place. The contrasts between extreme luxury and poverty are not visible, nor does one notice the heirarchy of class or caste. Everyone whether he is a porter at the railway station or a waiter in a restaurant is a "towardish"—comrade—and is addressed as such. Merit or status is not judged by wealth or by the largeness of the salary. We were told that the highest salary paid to the members of the communist party—and all the high officials belong to this party—is 225 roubles a month, equivalent to about Rs. 300. The president of the Russian Union gets this salary and probably his clerk gets something not much less, the only difference being that the president will have some

rooms to live in, a motor car for his use and some other facilities. The peasant from the village or the labourer from the factory visiting the president will meet him as if he was one of his own class, only cleverer and more capable, and will address him as "towardish."

Most of the motor cars to be seen were either taxis or cars belonging to the State or to organisations—soviets, trade unions, co-operatives, factories, big firms etc. Private cars, belonging to individuals, were not in evidence at all.

There were big shops and stores, outwardly resembling the shops of other cities. The big shops were all the property of the State, only the smaller ones belonging to individuals. There were also street hawkers trading in petty articles. Generally the goods displayed in the shops were simple and modest and had no pretensions to fashion or smartness. There were none of the dainties of the Rue de Rivoli or of Bond Street. People in the streets and indeed everywhere were clad regardless of fashion, many without collars or ties. Many of them of course could not afford to buy anything expensive. But apart

from the question of expense it was considered a bourgeois failing to waste time and money on clothes.

Some of the big squares had loud speakers which gave the news of the day and concerts and probably political speeches from time to time to convert the waverers and those in doubt. The communist does not miss a chance to give his gospel to the world.

We visited the State Opera House. It is a magnificent building, built in the Tsar's time, with seven golden tiers one over the other. In the days of the Tsar it was the meeting place of wealth and fashion. The audience we saw was very different. The house was full to overflowing with people in their work-a-day attire, sometimes without coats and in their shirt sleeves. There was no attempt at smartness or dressing up for the occasion. There were all homely looking folk—intellectuals and workers and peasants with a fair sprinkling of children. The performance, which consisted of dancing and singing and ballets, was exceedingly good and was thoroughly appreciated by the audience which insisted on encores. A little

boy and girl, not more than ten years of age, danced delightfully. The principal item however was the dance of a star performer of Tsarist days, now a woman of 60 but looking hardly 30. She danced amazingly well. Altogether, from the point of view of beauty and art, it was a show difficult to beat anywhere in the world.

We also visited a cinema show and saw a revolutionary film called "The Last Days of Petrograd". The Russians are famous for the beauty and artistic excellence of their films, but unhappily we in India have no opportunities of seeing them. We have a surfeit of the gorgeous but stupid and inane productions of Hollywood in America. The film we saw showed the contrast between luxury and misery in the days of the Tsar and then the ghastly scenes of the war. The downfall of the Tsar, the Kerensky government, and the fight for power between the Bolsheviki and Kerensky, ending with Lenin's victory, were shown very effectively. It was a very powerful and stirring film and its propaganda value must be immense.

We visited the museum of the Revolution housed in a building which was the

English Clubhouse in olden days—meaning thereby that it was an English type of club and not a club confined to Englishmen. There were many interesting things in the museum but on the whole we were rather disappointed with it. We saw also an art gallery and were specially interested in finding pictures in it from Asiatic Russia—Turkistan etc.

The magnificent Nobles' Hall of Tsarist days has now been converted into the Trade Union Hall. The Congress of the Friends of Russia was held in this hall. It is one of the finest halls I have seen.

The Kremlin with its stately buildings and domes was of course visited by us. We did not go inside the Tsar's old palace or any other building except to pay a short visit to Kalinin, the President of the Union. He lived in two or three rooms simply furnished with no evidence of luxury or grandeur.

The revolution has changed many things in Russia but it has not changed the Drosky. This is a primitive conveyance, a kind of four wheeled rickshaw drawn by a horse. Why anyone should use this ancient method of locomotion it was difficult to ima-

gine. There was room for only one person in it, or at most two thin persons, and the speed it went rarely exceeded six miles per hour.

The revolution has also not succeeded so far in putting down begging in the streets. We were often accosted by beggars, sometimes by young women with babes in their arms. The communists told us that this was much less than it used to be but it was difficult to wean the beggars from their age-long habit of begging.

Our stay in Moscow was too short for us to see much. But short as it was, it was enough to make us feel the fascination of this beautiful city. We came away with regret and with the desire to see again its golden domes shining in the sun and its streets and squares full of strange peoples from the east and the west.



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# CHAPTER IV

## THE SOVIET SYSTEM

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## CHAPTER IV

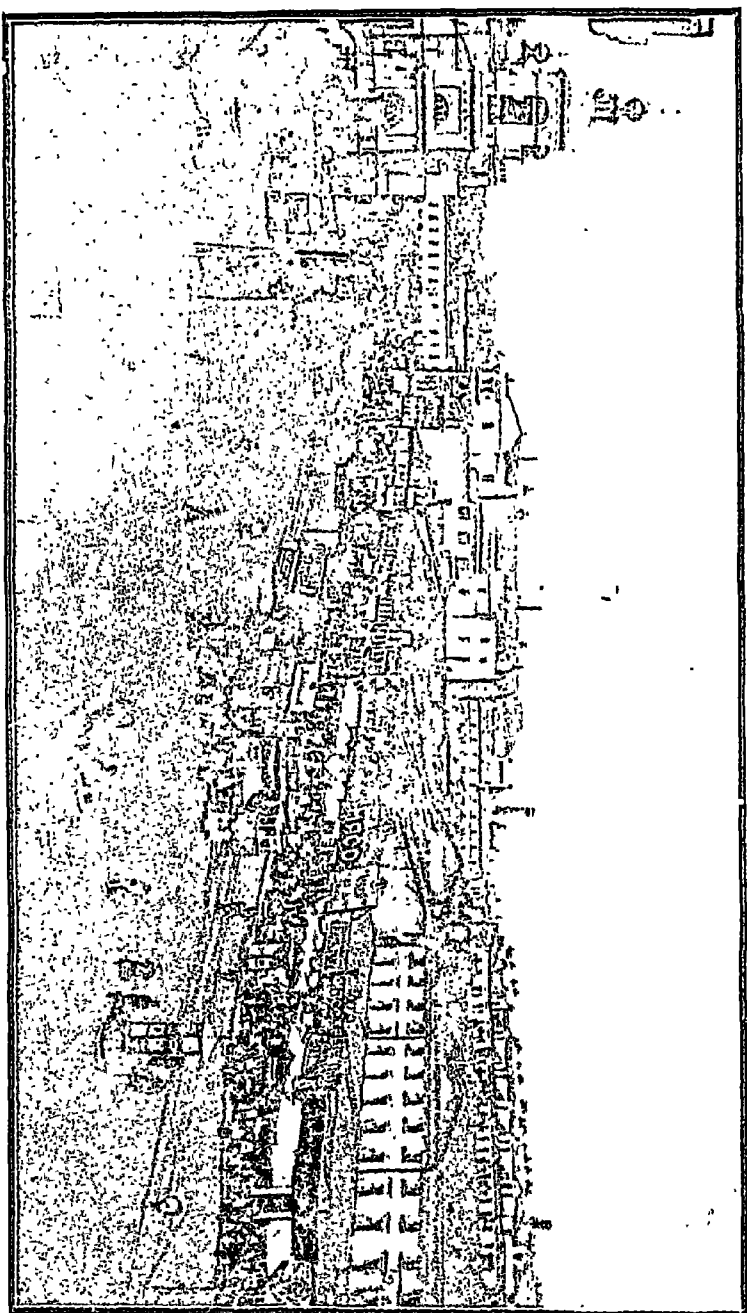
### THE SÓVIET SYSTEM

The Soviet system has become so much identified with Bolshevism and Russia that it is difficult to think of it apart from them. Yet it is conceivable that it may exist, or rather that its outward structure may exist, without communism. One of the fugitive ex-grand dukes of Russia, who considers himself the rightful Czar of Russia and who still clings to a lingering hope that he might one day instal himself in the Kremlin, stated some time ago that he approved of it and would continue it, minus of course the communism. But for all practical purposes we might consider it as synonymous with the present regime in Russia.

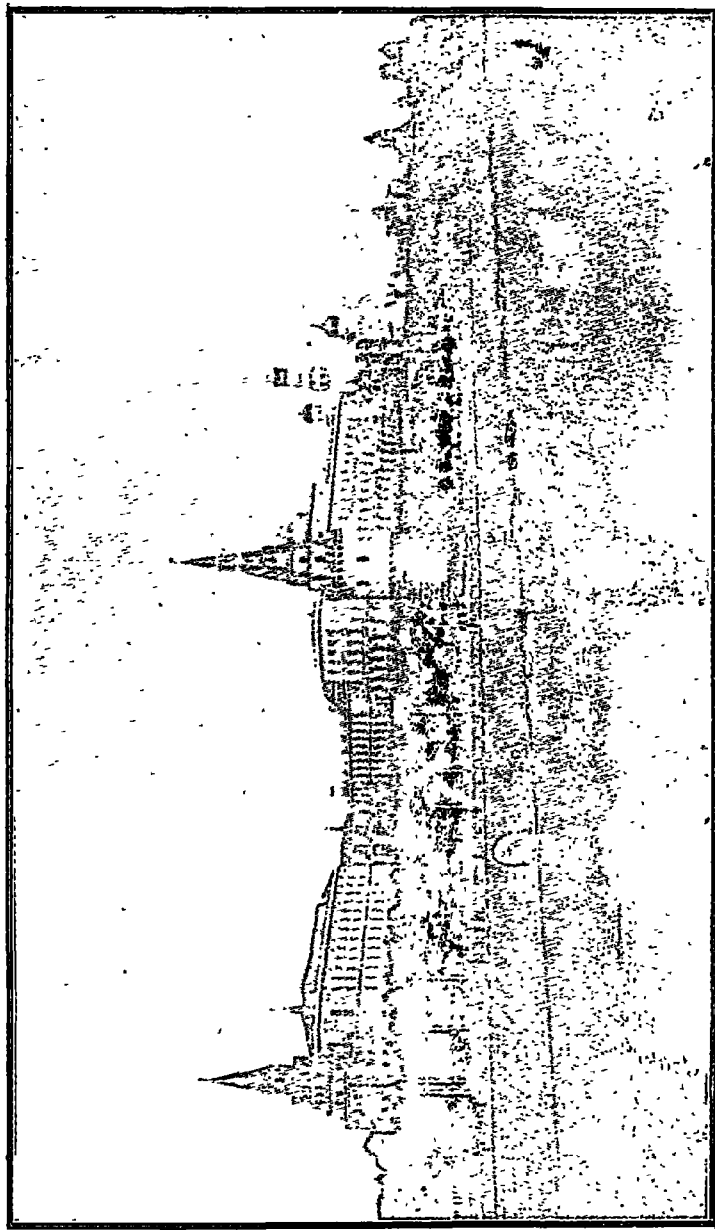
The Soviet idea was probably first outlined in 1834 by James Smith, one of the leaders of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union started by Robert Owen in England. In 1847 was issued the famous Communist Manifesto of Marx

and Engels, which is considered to be the parent of present day communism. Nearly a generation later in 1871 Paris had its brief and tragic spell of the Commune. Louis Auguste Blanqui, the father of the Commune, clearly advocated a temporary dictatorship of the proletariat during a revolutionary period. Blanqui himself was put in prison the day before the Commune was declared in Paris and largely owing to his enforced absence and the lack of efficient leadership, the Commune fell, drowned in the blood of thirty thousand Parisians who were mercilessly slaughtered by Thiers and his generals. Today only the memory of it remains but it is a living and a vivid memory. And the wall in the Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris—*le mur des fédérés*—where the communards who had been taken prisoners were mowed down by machine guns, has become a place of pilgrimage for the communists and socialists of the world.

During the revolution of 1905 in Russia the Soviet system already took definite shape. It grew and developed and changed continuously till it found itself firmly established in the seats of power in 1917.



The Okhotiny Market, Moscow



The Kremlin, Moscow

Its growth became rapid after the Bolshevik revolution and it has since been continuously adapting itself to changing conditions.

The main characteristic of the Soviet system is its open recognition of the fact that society consists of different social groups or classes, each with different economic interests. So long as this condition lasts every government must express the relative importance and strength of these social classes. The long course of history is interpreted as a conflict between these different social groups or classes. We thus have what is called the economic interpretation of history or historic materialism. In each historic period, we are told, there is a dominating class, and the interests of other classes are only considered in so far as they serve to prolong or strengthen this domination. But this domination of one class over the others is seldom, if ever, clearly and openly expressed in the form of government. It is disguised in various ways to delude those who are exploited by it and, where changes are slow, the dominating class creates an impression of eternal rights and duties, to

safeguard its own interests. As society changes and newer and higher forms of the economic and social structure develop, new classes representing this development come to the front. These classes gradually get the upper hand over those older ones which had become obstacles to further development.

The dominating class controls the culture and education and the laws and customs of the people, but it always covers up its class character, specially when a new class begins to resist and to demand its own rights. Even present day "democracy" according to the communists, is a form of government based on class domination, although it seeks cleverly to cover its class character. It is not in reality a social or human democracy. Its essential characteristic is to split up society into a number of individuals with the fiction of equality and to organise the dominating class into a formidable capitalist state against which individuals or divided groups are powerless. Its class character can be seen when efforts are made to organise other classes. Our present day democracies then ruthlessly suppress all such

organisations.

The Soviets in Russia from the very beginning appeared as class organisations of workers. They were quite separate from the labour unions, although the advanced elements of the latter participated in the Soviets and combined with other similar elements. During the Kerensky period in 1917 the power of the Soviets increased greatly till, with Lenin's slogan "All power to the Soviets", they became a rival and competing government.

During the earlier period before the revolution the Soviets represented the working class only. Then the soldiers and sailors came in, and later the peasants. But the peasantry were not given quite the same representation as the workers as the latter were considered the more progressive group. Intellectuals were also allowed to participate but such as were in the service of the capitalist elements were excluded. The richer peasants were at first admitted but later most of them were excluded. Those living from the labour of others or on rent, old Czarist officers generally and priests, were excluded, but some exceptions were made. In effect, the

exclusions effected a comparatively small number of persons, amounting to 3.7 per cent of the adult population.

The governing principle under which groups are included or excluded is said to be as follows: those groups or classes that are necessary or useful to the development of society at a certain stage should be admitted at that stage, and that the most progressive element should have the opportunity to exercise influence in accordance with its energy and social significance. The power of exclusion or inclusion ultimately rests with the All Russia Congress of Soviets—the highest governing body. The principle to be followed was laid down by the 3rd All R. S. Congress in January 1918—"There must be no participation in the Soviet government by members of the exploiting classes." This was embodied in the constitution as adopted by the 5th All R. S. Congress in July 1918. The actual lists of exclusions are made by committees that supervise the elections for the different local soviets. These lists are subject to discussion and appeal to higher soviets and ultimately to the All Russia Soviet Congress or its executive

committee. Communists declare that these exclusions are only necessary in the present transitional stage and that as the system develops it will embrace all useful human beings working with their hands or brains. This may be the ultimate result but for the present the system certainly helps greatly in the control of the State by a strong and well-knit minority. But the minority will not long remain in power if it has not got the support or at any rate the passive acquiescence of the masses. Hence we have what is called the "dictatorship of the proletariat", which in effect means the dictatorship of an advanced class conscious and disciplined group claiming to represent and to possess the good will of the masses. In defence of this dictatorship communists point out that present day democracies are in reality also dictatorships. But the latter are dictatorships of the capitalist class or the bourgeoisie and are meant to further the interests of this class. They are the dictatorships of the 10 per cent or less, whilst the dictatorship of the proletariat is supposed to be of the 90 per cent.

The characteristic feature of the Soviet

system is its method of representation. It is not, as in most democratic countries, based on territorial or geographical constituencies, where the individual is the unit. The structure of the soviets is based on economic and social units *e.g.* factories, villages, co-operatives, trade unions etc. The number of delegates elected are proportional to the number of voters, small units combining for the purpose of electing representatives. There is one important deviation however from proportionality—the village electing one delegate for 10,000 voters, the town one delegate for 2000 voters. The town dwellers, which means chiefly the industrial workers, are considered more advanced socially and are thus given more weightage.

The village soviet is said to be the soul of the village. The word "soviet" means "sabha" and a village soviet would correspond to a *panchayat* elected by almost all the residents of an Indian village. This soviet is elected by show of hands at a kind of public meeting at which all the residents, men and women above a certain age, with certain exceptions, have the right to be present and to vote. The exceptions are

rich peasants living by the labour of others, usurers, priests and such other elements as may be considered parasitical and unsocial. If there are any small industries or public institutions in the village, they will also send delegates direct to the Soviet. So also the local co-operative society, the Union of peasant labourers, women's organisations and the Young People's League.

There is generally a big non-communist majority in the village soviet but a few communists are always present, and as these are usually the most active and intelligent members, their influence is considerable.

Most of the questions touching the daily life of the villagers are decided by the village soviet, subject to a right of appeal to higher soviets, which are also empowered to interfere when necessary. Thus the village soviet will deal with land problems and specially the distribution of land, the distribution of seeds for cultivation, wood to be cut in common forests, taxes according to general regulations, building of schools and medical halls, medical service, fire protection, mutual aid etc. The Soviet also serves as a link between the various

other organisations in the village, and there is a growing number of these co-operatives, mutual aid societies, women's organisations, Young People's Leagues, Pioneers (corresponding to the Boy Scouts), international aid societies etc.

Two other important features of the Soviet system might be mentioned here. The first is the power of recall. Each constituency has the right to recall its representatives in any soviet at any time. In other countries, as is well known, representatives to the legislatures are elected for a fixed period of three or four or five years and cannot be recalled. The second feature is the combination of the legislative and executive functions in the soviets. But it is not quite clear how this is done.

It is claimed that the soviet system reflects the real life of the community far more than any other. It is responsive and flexible and can be made to fit changing conditions so that the natural growth of a people to a better order is not impeded in any way.

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## CHAPTER V

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE U. S. S. R.

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## CHAPTER V

### THE CONSTITUTION OF THE U. S. S. R.

The Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (U. S. S. R.) was formed in December, 1922. Before the formation of the Union there were four separate republics: the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic (R. S. F. S. R.), Ukraine, White Russia and Transcaucasia. They carried on an independent existence but were allied to each other and had mutual agreements on many matters. The decision to form a Union was arrived at separately by the allied republics at their respective Congresses of Soviets. These Congresses also chose delegates to take part in framing a constitution for the Union.

Originally these were the four members of the Union but in 1925 two other republics joined it. The Union now consists of the R. S. F. S. R., Ukraine, White Russia, Transcaucasia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Two of these constituent members are themselves federations. Thus the

R. S. F. S. R. consists of nine republics : Crimean, Tartar, Bashkir, Buriat-Mongolian, Kechiz, Karelian, Dagestan, Lakut, and the German Volga Republic. The Transcaucasian F. S. S. R. consists of three republics : Azerbaijan, Armenian and Georgian. Besides these separate republics there are a large number of autonomous regions, there being twelve such in the R. S. F. S. R. alone.

All these republics are supposed to be sovereign except in so far as powers have been assigned to the Union. Among these powers which have been assigned are foreign relations, acceptance of new republics into Union, and certain aspects of trade and taxation. The Union, says article four of the constitution, is "a voluntary union of equal peoples" and "each of the Soviet republics retains the right of free secession from the Union....the new United State is a worthy crown of the foundations laid in October, 1917 of the peaceful dwelling together and the brotherly collaboration of peoples."

The constitution of the Union can be changed just like any other law. It is thus flexible and easily adaptable to new condi-

tions. It is based on the recognition of national differences and freedom to develop different cultures. It is entirely opposed to the autocratic unitary state of the old regime which tried to impose its own language and culture on all the various nationalities under its control.

The supreme authority is the All Union Congress. The Union Council is elected on the basis of proportional representation of each constituent republic, and the Council of Nationalities is elected on the basis of five members for every republic and one for each autonomous region. Thus in the Council of Nationalities, the R. S. F. S. R., the principal and dominating republic of the Union, has the same number of representatives as any of the smaller republics.

The Central Executive Committee of the All Union Congress is comparable in some measure to a Parliament, the Congress itself consisting of over 1,100 members and meeting only once in six months. All legislation has to pass both chambers of the Committee. Thus the Council of Nationalities has a determining voice in all important matters. It is therefore claimed

that the various autonomous republics have not only full opportunities of developing their own economic and social life and culture, but they take part in a decisive manner in the general government of the Union.

All Soviets and their executives and representatives are elected annually. Only the All Union Congress is elected every second year.

The All Union Congress also elects the heads of various departments, the Commissars, and these form the Union Council of Peoples' Commissars which is practically the cabinet of the Union.

Each constituent republic has its own Soviet Congresses, Central Executive Committee and Council of Peoples' Commissars. Certain departments, *e.g.*, foreign affairs, are reserved for the Union Government; certain others exist both in the Union and in the individual republics, *e.g.*, supreme economic council, labour, finance etc., and many exist only in the republics, *e.g.*, agriculture, justice, education, health, social welfare etc.

In each republic the soviet system is built up from village and factory upwards

by means of indirect and direct elections. Thus the village soviet elects the rural District Soviet Congress and its executive committee, and the latter the Provincial Soviet Congress, which in its turn sends representatives to the Republican Congress. In the towns the urban Soviet elects the district as well as directly the Provincial Soviet. The Provincial Soviets elect representatives for the Republican Congress, but town areas have also the right of direct representation in this Congress. Thus the rural areas are represented very indirectly in the All Russia or other republican congress whilst the town areas are represented both directly and indirectly.

In the rural soviets, both the village and the district, the peasants are in a considerable majority. But gradually the proportion of communists increases in the higher soviet organs and they are in absolute control of all positions of power. The All Russian Soviet is entirely dominated by them.

The Communist Party, although it has apparently no official status in the constitution is really a pillar of the Soviet regime. It is a solid exclusive organisation represent-

ing the advanced elements of the working class and with a very definite purpose and programme. It is well organised and the discipline is military in its severity. The conviction of the communist that he represents the interests of the future of humanity can only be compared with the faith and zeal of a religious enthusiast. The party admits intellectuals and peasants to its ranks but only such as understand and appreciate the theory and practice of the dictatorship of the proletariat. It is not very easy to join the party, and to preserve its purity, there are periodical "cleansings," as they are called, when those who are considered undesirable are excluded. The power of the party may be judged from the fact that the most powerful individual in the Soviet Union today is Stalin, the general secretary of the party, although he holds no other high official position.

There are large numbers of boards and commissions performing various duties, the most important being the Supreme Economic Council with its offshoots. The industrial units, such as Labour Unions etc. are also essential parts of the State organisations. They are built on industrial lines,

not those of craft. Thus all workers in a big industry belong to one union, whether they are miners, carpenters or mechanics. Then there is the wide ramification of co-operative societies and organisations of women, youth, pioneers etc.

The Labour Unions and factory committees look after the interests of the workers in the factory, but the manager or board of managers of any industry are appointed by the Supreme Economic Council on behalf of the All Russian Soviet. In case there is a conflict between the manager and labour, there is a system of conflict committees and appeals. The manager may be removed or transferred.

Such in brief are some of the features of the Soviet constitution. It is admittedly framed to keep all power in the hands of the workers, and to give no quarter to capitalism or to those who want to bring back capitalism. Whether capitalism may not creep back in disguise in some form or other is a difficult question to answer. But in their fight against it the Bolsheviki do not propose to be guided by "bourgeois democracy." In the manifesto of the first Communist International issued under the

signatures of Lenin, Trotsky and others in March 1919, it was stated that "to demand of the proletariat in the final life and death struggle with capitalism, that it should obey lamb-like the precepts of bourgeois democracy would be the same as to ask a man who is defending his life against robbers to follow the artificial rules of a French duel that have been set by his enemy but not followed by him."

We have the dictatorship of the proletariat to day. But this, we are told, is a period of transition only, or a period of preparation for the great time to come when class conflicts will entirely cease as there will be only one class, and the State itself will sink into insignificance. That will be real communism, which in the words of the communist manifesto will "end the domination of capital, make war impossible, wipe out state boundaries, transform the whole world into one co-operative commonwealth and bring about real human brotherhood and freedom."

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## CHAPTER VI

SOME BOOKS ON RUSSIA

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## CHAPTER VI

### SOME BOOKS ON RUSSIA

I remember attending a banquet given by the scientists and professors in Moscow. There were people from many countries present and speeches in a variety of languages were made. I remember specially a speech given by a young student who had come from far Uruguay in South America. He had come on behalf of his fellow students to see this strange land for himself and the impressions he had gathered had filled him with fiery enthusiasm. He spoke in the beautiful sonorous periods of the Spanish language and he told us that he was going back to his distant country with the red star of Soviet Russia engraved on his heart and carrying the message of social freedom to his young comrades in Uruguay. Such was the reaction of Soviet Russia on his young and generous heart. And yet there are many who tell us that Russia is a land of anarchy and misery and the Bolsheviks are assassins and murderers

who have cast themselves outside the pale of human society.

Who is right? Or is it that both are right in some measure? I shall not venture to pass judgment or to give final opinions. I too am impressionable and I must confess that the impressions I carried back with me from Moscow were very favourable and all my reading has confirmed these impressions, although there is much that I do not understand and much that I do not like or admire. I shall only note down what I saw and leave it to others to draw their own conclusions, well realising that what I saw was a very small part of what might have been seen.

But personal impressions, as Professor K. T. Shah has pointed out in his interesting series of lectures ("*The Russian Experiment 1917-1927*", Taraporevala) are seldom very reliable guides although they may give a touch of colour to a bald narrative. Those who are interested should go to the books on the subject and read both sides of the question. There is already a vast and growing literature and as I have often been asked to suggest books on Russia, I shall name some that I have come across. There

are quite a large number of books in English written in criticism of the Bolshevik regime. Pro-Bolshevik literature is not so well represented in English as in German and other languages. But recently a number of little books have come out in English which though critical of many aspects of communism are written with some sympathy for its basic ideas and achievements.

A proper study of Bolshevism must start with some knowledge of the theory of communism and its historical development. "Ignorance and communism are incompatible" said Blanqui, the father of the Paris Commune of 1871, and it is extraordinary how even today communists are eager to educate everyone in the principles of their doctrine. If they wish to convert any one they will hurl at him a number of fat tomes from Marx's "*Capital*"—the Bible of the communists—and Engel's writings to the books of Lenin and Bukharin. But life is perhaps too short to read all this heavy literature. A little book by the master of Balliol College, Oxford, A. D. Lindsay, on "*Karl Marx's Capital*" (Oxford University Press) is help-

ful in giving some idea of Marx's theories. It is a critical book and even more so is F. R. Salter's "*Karl Marx and Modern Socialism*" (Macmillan). The communist view-point is best given in Bukharin's "*Historic Materialism*" (George Allen and Unwin) and his *Economic Theory of the Leisure Class*" (Martin Lawrence). Bogdonoff's "*Short Course of Economic Science*" (Communist Party, London) is still I believe used as a text book in Russia. There are several books of Lenin available, I think in English, but the only one I have come across is his "*Imperialism—The Last Stage of Capitalism*" (Communist Party, London). Those who are interested in the controversy between the Bolsheviks and the German Karl Kautsky, who though vigorously attacking the Bolsheviks claims to be a true follower of Marx, may like to read Kautsky's "*The Labour Revolution*" (George Allen and Unwin). Lenin replied to this and Trotsky's brilliant polemic "*In Defence of Terrorism*" is also a reply.

A very ably written book is Prof. Laski's "*Communism*" in the Home University Library. It criticises the theory and practice and it has called forth, I am

told, an equally able reply from the British Communist Party, but I have not seen the latter.

These books, or even some of them, should enable the enquirer to have some idea of what the Bolsheviki stand for. Two other controversial books might also be mentioned; Trotsky's "*Where is Britain Going?*" and Norman Angell's "*Must Britain Follow the Moscow Road?*" (Noel Douglas). Another book—"The Bolshevik Theory" by R. W. Postgate (Grant Richards) is a clear and good and sometimes critical account of the theory underlying the Soviet system, but the book is somewhat out of date, unless a new edition has come out since 1920.

Thus far the theory. But to understand the great drama of the Russian revolution and the inner forces that shaped and brought the great change about, a study of cold theory is of little use. The October revolution was undoubtedly one of the great events of world history, the greatest since the first French revolution, and its story is more absorbing, from the human and the dramatic point of view, than any tale or phantasy. Something of its elemen-

tal power can be felt in two accounts of eye witnesses—an Englishman and an American. The former, M. Phillips Price, was the correspondent of the "Manchester Guardian" in Russia, and in his book—*"My Reminiscences of the Russian Revolution"* (George Allen and Unwin), he has told us the day to day story of Russia during those eventful days. From the March Revolution he has told the story, when Kerensky came into power; of how the red dawn broke in Moscow and the shackles of centuries of Tsardom were suddenly removed; of the coming of Lenin and of how he was jeered at in the very Soviet which a few months later was to make him the dictator of a vast territory; of the pitiful shufflings of Kerensky and his weak compromises with reaction; of the growth of the soviets and their victory and ultimate capture by the Bolsheviks. He has also told us of the months of struggle against external and internal enemies when the Soviet power held on by a thread by sheer tenacity when all hope seemed to be lost.

The second book—*"Ten Days that Shook the World"*—is by John Reed, an

American correspondent. This deals in even greater detail with the first ten days of the October Revolution. And as one reads, with horror and pain at times, the wonder grows that such a miracle could have happened and succeeded. And above all there is admiration for the group of men who did not flinch at the mightiest of obstacles, and, in the midst of war and rebellion with a cruel death and disaster continually facing them, sat down to evolve a socialist order out of the chaos that surrounded them. They had time even on the fourth day of the revolution, with firing going on in the streets, to establish the eight hour day for the workers and formulate their policy for a system of popular education. Within a week they had tackled the problem of minorities, which like the poor is always with us in India, and declared :

1. "The equality and sovereignty of the peoples of Russia.
2. The right of the peoples of Russia to free self-determination, even to the point of separation and the formation of an independent state.
3. The abolition of any and all national and national-religious privileges and disabilities.

## S O V I E T   R U S S I A

4. The free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups inhabiting the territory of Russia”.

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## CHAPTER VII

LENIN

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## CHAPTER VII

LENIN

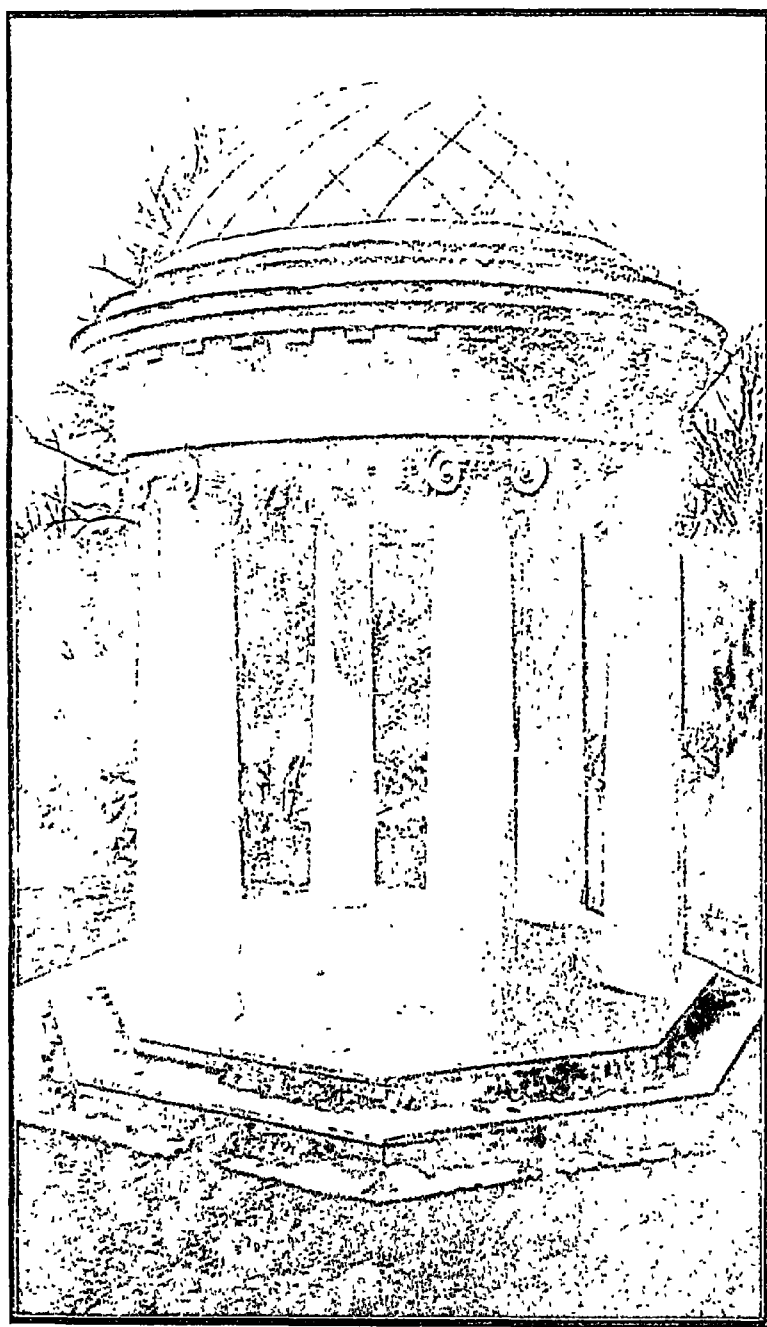
I have already referred to a number of books which might help in understanding the back ground of the Russian revolution. Like every other great upheaval it had its causes deep down in history and in the misery of generations of human beings. Economic factors, we are told, govern the world and politics is rapidly becoming a handmaid of economics. But Russia also repeats the lesson of history that men also shape destiny and some times the will of one man alters the lives of millions. It is instructive therefore to study the careers of some of the makers of the revolution, who out of anarchy and chaos created a new and strong Russia. Exiles, with no knowledge of military affairs, creating great and victorious armies; with no experience of diplomacy, treating successfully with the well-seasoned diplomats of other countries; with no knowledge of business or administration running an

enormous state machine which controlled all production and distribution. Specially it is worth while to know something of the greatest of these—Lenin.

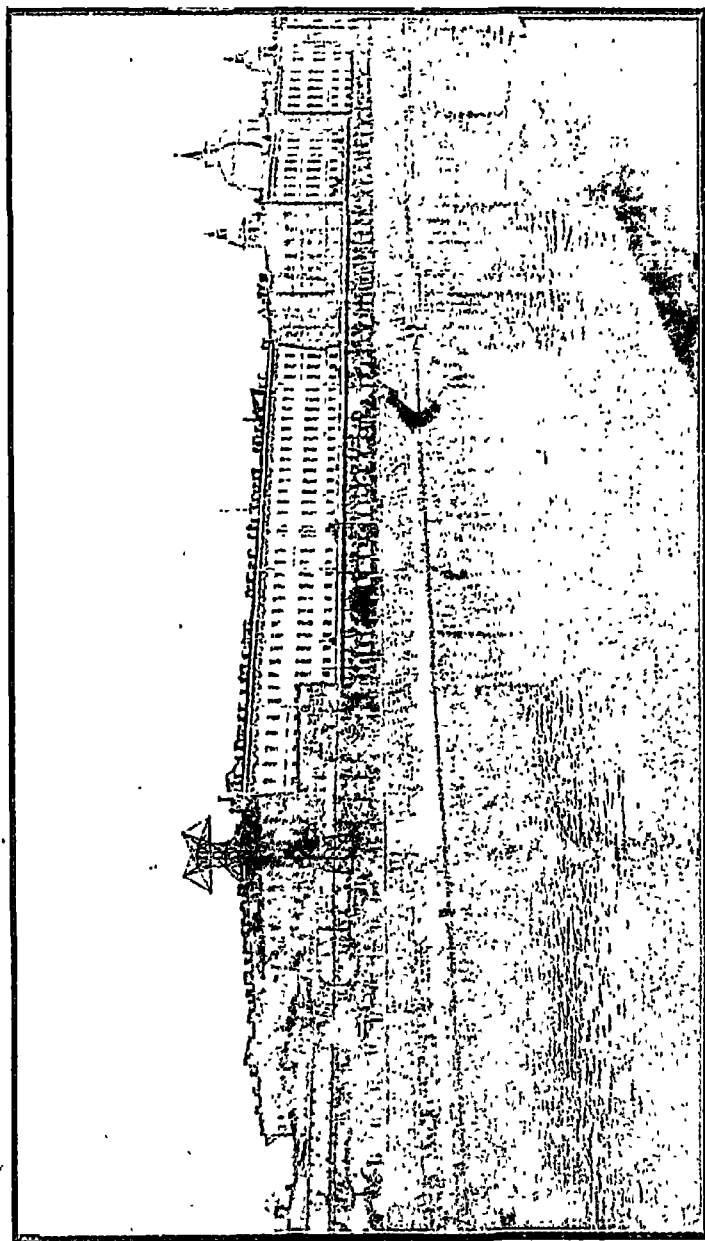
Many people have paid their tribute of admiration to him, but I have unfortunately not come across a satisfactory account of his life.\* A book which will interest Indian readers is Rene Fullop Miller's "*Lenin and Gandhi*" (Putnam). It is somewhat superficial and does not satisfy but it contains some good pen-pictures of Lenin. A short and interesting sketch of Lenin is also to be found in Emil Ludwig's "*Genius and Character*" (Jonathan Cape).

Four years ago Lenin died. He was just over fifty, of which thirty years had been spent in preparation and ceaseless toil varied with persecution and flight and Siberia.. Victory came to him in the end but with it came years of tremendous difficulty and danger. He died as the result of a bullet wound but before he died he had conquered over these difficulties

\*A recent book, highly spoken of, is "Lenin" by Valerin Marcu—Translated from the German into English (Victor Gollancz).



A Pavilion where Lenin often used to rest



Moscow University [The old building]

and dangers and he passed away in the knowledge of his triumph. Today he lies embalmed in a simple mausoleum in the beautiful Red Square of Moscow under the shadow of the Kremlin. He lies asleep as it were and it is difficult to believe that he is dead. In life they say he was not beautiful to look at. He had too much of common clay in him and about him was the "smell of the Russian soil." But in death there is a strange beauty and his brow is peaceful and unclouded. On his lips there hovers a smile and there is a suggestion of pugnacity, of work done and success achieved. He has a uniform on and one of his hands is lightly clenched. Even in death he is the dictator.

To this resting place of Lenin's body come people from distant parts to do reverence to his memory. Every evening the doors are thrown open for some hours and a continuous stream of the peasants and workers, for whom he lived and died and who loved him, passes by. The orthodox Church is at a discount in Russia but the cult of Lenin is everywhere in evidence. Every shop, every room almost, has his picture or bust. "In a religious age," says

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Maxim Gorki, "people would have made him a saint." In India he would certainly have been canonised, but saints are not held in repute in Soviet circles, and the people of Russia have done him the higher honour of loving him as one of themselves. To each of them he was a brother, a comrade, who knew and laboured for them and to whom they could always turn when in distress.

"I know a pair of eyes which have been for ever numbed by the burning sorrow of the Terror," said Gorky of Lenin. This sorrow did not leave him to the end. It made him a fierce fanatic and gave him the strength of will to persevere and achieve. But sorrow for the misery of his fellow men did not make him gloomy or reserved. He was "filled to the brim with the sap of life" and even "in the unhappiest moments of his existence, he was serene and always prone to gay laughter."

Lenin's early years were typical of the man. When he was seventeen his elder brother was hanged for an attempt on the life of the Tsar. He was profoundly moved but even then he saw clearly that nothing could be gained by terroristic methods.

"We cannot succeed in that way ; it is not the right way," he said. But that did not mean his giving up the struggle. He set about preparing in his own way. It was a long way and a wearisome way but quietly and persistently he worked at it for thirty years of his life. He did not suddenly develop into a champion of the workers. He paid little attention to speaking in public or writing, but set himself down to investigate and understand thoroughly the masses. In after years he had little patience with orators and fine speakers ; he was always afraid of too many words preventing action. For him action was the only thing that counted. "Revolutions," according to him, "must not remain on paper, they must be carried out in action ; and the proper execution of even the most unimportant measure was more important for the existence of Soviet Russia than ten Soviet resolutions." Thus, as Maxim Gorky has said : "His heroism lacked almost all external glitter. It was the modest ascetic zeal, not seldom seen in Russia, of a revolutionary who believed in the possibility of justice on earth, the heroism of a man who, for the

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sake of his heavy task, renounced all worldly joys."

A classic instance is often given of his utter calmness in emergency and his attention to trivial detail even when the life of the State was threatened. During the critical days of 1921 when Moscow itself was threatened by the enemy and most people thought that the Soviet power was going to collapse, Lenin thought of the introduction of electric light in the villages and issued an ordinance for the immediate supply of electric light to certain areas.

Lenin has been called the coldest of fanatics. He would never let himself be carried away by enthusiasm and would not give in to the best of his friends even at the risk of a break. He had no use for sympathisers who did not actively join the fray. Only full-blooded adherents were to his liking, experts in revolution who devoted themselves wholly to the cause. Revolution was to be prepared for cautiously and quietly by educating "revolutionary experts, men who were revolutionaries by profession and not mere enthusiasts, idealists or dilettanti". He rea-

lised, what we in India are dimly beginning to appreciate, that it is a difficult, if not an impossible task, for amateurs, with little time to spare from their daily routine and no special training, to fight whole-timers who are experts at their business of defending the existing regime. "Let our comrades," he wrote, "permit the use of the rigorous term 'technical expert,' for when I speak of inadequate preparations the accusation applies also to myself. I have worked with men who set themselves very high and difficult responsibilities, yet we suffered painfully from the feeling that we were but amateurs. The more ashamed I am to confess this, the more bitter I feel towards those sham socialists who fail to realise that we dare not lower the revolutionary to the level of the amateur." With how much greater truth does this apply to all of us in India who dabble in politics !

Lenin was no believer in a patched up unity of which we hear so much in our country. He deliberately broke up his party as early as 1903 by his insistence on action, and was accused by his own colleague, Trotsky, of being the "destroyer of the party." He insisted that the rules of the

party should lay down that each member must actively participate in the work and not merely give monetary help. The minority of the party wanted to give sympathy and financial aid only, but Lenin would have neither unless action followed. And so the men of action separated from the men of sympathy and money. When later he was approached with proposals for unity he said with a smile: "I recognise only one form of conciliation with political opponents, *écraser*—smash them," words spoken without the least emotion or excitement.

Gradually his colleagues left him but he had no fear and did not budge an inch. "I shall perhaps be alone," he said, "but I shall never be turned aside from my opinions; I shall never cease to champion them and follow the straight line."

And yet, fanatic as he was and unbending, he was a realist and ever willing to change his policy if the situation demanded it. Lunacharsky, a friend of his and the present Commissar of Education in Russia, has called him "a genius at opportunism." "It is childish," Lenin wrote, "to reject compromise on principle..... One must simply know how to analyse the circum-

stances and the concrete conditions of each issue." And again when accused of departing from some maxim of socialism he said ; "You are worse than hens. A hen has not the courage to cross a chalk line, but it can at least justify itself by pointing out that the chalk circle was drawn by some body else. But you have drawn your own circle and are now gazing at the chalk-line instead of seeing reality !" Perhaps we may find many of these chalk-lines of our own making in India also, which keep us from looking at reality.

One of the greatest shocks that he gave to his followers was after the failure of the 1905 revolution. Not daunted by this, the advocate of an armed rising suddenly recommended a participation in the moderate and semi-official Duma, and asked his adherents to study the detailed reports of its sessions. This was with no desire to give up his principles or to adopt the evolutionary method. But he felt that the only platform open to him then for carrying on revolutionary propaganda was through the Duma. He was decried as a weakling and a victim of parliamentarianism; but regardless of censure he pursued his path, nonetheless keep-

ing armed revolution as his goal. To us in India with our controversies about Council entry his change of front must prove interesting.

In these days of pacts and unity conferences Lenin's views on the subject may be of interest. In a letter to a friend in 1912 he wrote: "The bourgeoisie, the liberals and the social revolutionaries, who never deal with 'great problems' seriously, but trot one behind the other make pacts and go on in the old grooves with eclecticism, are always crying out about the dissensions and discords in social democracy. That is the exact difference between all of them and social democracy; the fight between the individual social democratic groups comes from deep roots of thought, whereas with them even the differences are varnished over on the surface, while inside they are empty, petty and superficial. Never at any price would I exchange the vigorous fighting of the various tendencies in social democracy for the toggled-up emptiness and poverty of the social revolutionaries and their partners."

So Lenin prepared for the great day. And when this came early in 1917 and he

was summoned from Switzerland to his country to lead the revolution he left a message to the Swiss workers. There was no hint of excitement or exaltation at the approaching fruition of the labour of a life time. Carefully, like a scientist, he stated what the conditions in Russia were and what he wished to do.

It is difficult for most of us to think of our ideals and our theories in terms of reality. We have talked and written of Swaraj for years but when Swaraj comes it will probably take us by surprise. We have passed the independence resolution at the Congress, and yet how many of us realise its full implications? How many belie it by their words and actions? For them it is something to be considered as a distant goal, not as a thing of to-day or to-morrow. They talk of Swaraj and independence in their conferences and their councils but their minds are full of reservations and their acts are feeble and halting.

In Russia also the revolutionaries of an older generation lived in a world of theory and hardly believed in the realisation of their ideals. But Lenin came with his directness and realism and shook the fabric

of old time orthodox socialism and revolution. He taught people to think that the ideal they had dreamed of and worked for was not mere theory but something to be realised then and there. By amazing power of will he hypnotised a nation and filled a disunited and demoralised people with energy and determination and the strength to endure and suffer for a cause.

Many had their full share in this remarkable triumph, among them specially Trotsky who now lies in Siberia. But Lenin stood supreme. Saint or sinner, the miracle was chiefly of his doing. And we may well say with Romain Rolland that Lenin was "the greatest man of action in our century and at the same time the most selfless."

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## CHAPTER VIII

MORE BOOKS

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## CHAPTER VIII

### MORE BOOKS

I have suggested that an attempt to understand Russia as she is to day should begin with the study of the theory of communism and the history of the Russian revolution. With my very limited knowledge of the subject I have mentioned the names of a few books that might help in this enquiry. But the real test of the success of the revolution does not lie in the theory, or in the courage and enthusiasm of the people, or even in the greatness of Lenin. Nor can the revolution be said to have been a failure because the Bolsheviks ruthlessly exterminated their opponents and countered the white terror with the red. The real test of success can only be the measure of happiness of the masses of the people. It is partly a question of psychology but partly also of material condition and facts and figures. It is not easy to judge the psychology of a people without the most intimate

knowledge. It may be that freedom from oppression is preferable even though it results in a diminution of material well-being for a time; and visitors to Russia tell us that in the early years of the revolution when civil war and the blockade had brought the population to the verge of starvation, the new freedom more than compensated for the suffering and lack of food and all comforts. But leaving the realms of psychology alone, we can at least study the material conditions that have resulted from the revolution and follow their changes from year to year, and thus perhaps be able to indicate the lines of future progress or retrogression.

There is now an abundance of material for this study but my own knowledge of it is unfortunately meagre. I shall only mention here some of the books I have read and some I have heard spoken of. "*Bolshevist Russia*" by Anton Karlgren, Professor of Slav at the University of Copenhagen (George Allen and Unwin) is patently anti-Bolshevik propaganda. I mention it so that the other side of the case may be fully known. Bertrand Russell's "*Theory and Practice of Bolshevism*"

(George Allen and Unwin) is also a criticism of the Soviet system, though a temperate one. Bertrand Russell and his wife both visited Russia and it is curious that they returned with entirely different impressions—he was depressed with much that he saw, she was enthusiastic and believed that the foundations of a happier order were being laid by the Bolsheviks. Their visit took place in the earlier years before Russia had sufficiently recovered from the dark days of the civil war.

A ponderous book worth consulting, if only for the fine pictures it contains, is Rene Fulop-Miller's "*Mind and Face of Bolshevism*" (Putnam). It deals with the cultural side of Russia, and though very critical and not appreciative of much, is helpful in giving some idea of many of the tendencies of modern Russia.

A recent book, well recommended, but which I have not read, is Maurice Dobb's "*Russian Economic Developments since the Revolution*" (Routledge). Dobb is an eminent economist with considerable sympathy for the basic ideas of the revolution, but withal critical and scientific. He deals with the growth and changes in

Russia's economic policy, of the interaction of the communist in the cities and the conservative peasantry in the villages, and specially with the effects on production.

Another recent publication is the report of the British Workers' Delegations to the Tenth Anniversary celebrations in Russia last year. This is called "*Soviet Russia To-day*" (Labour Research Department, London). It is frankly a report of the friends of Russia but is none the less valuable and full of information. It is signed by 92 representatives of workers' organisations in England and Scotland and no such document however partisan it may be can be lightly treated. It is not very critical and is full of enthusiasm for what they saw. Indeed as they themselves say: "No writing can adequately express the intense emotional experiences of every day of our visit, when we realised that in this country the crushing weight of feudalism and capitalism had been thrown off, and the highest achievements of knowledge and industrial development were here at the service of the working class." That Russia should produce such a re-

action on representative hard-headed workers is itself a significant fact. It gives us a glimpse of how the Russian revolution is creeping into the hearts of workers in different countries and Moscow is becoming the Mecca of the proletariat. Soviet Russia by translating their dreams into reality has given them a new hope and a new courage.

I remember meeting a negro worker who had come from South Africa to the Brussels Congress against Imperialism. He was not a well-read or well-informed man; he was just a simple worker. He said at the Congress that although he had been told a great deal against Russia, somehow he felt that it could not be all true, and he and his kind had a soft corner in their hearts for Russia, and looked to her with hope.

This report of the British Labour Delegation gives us a great many facts and impressions in a short compass. It deals with the factories and working conditions; with wages, rents and housing; with education; with prisons; the peasantry; and co-operation. Having read it one feels that if only half of what is written is true,

Russia indeed is a land of hope.

One other series of books I shall mention. This is now being issued by the Vanguard Press of New York, at 50 cents a volume, and it comprises 13 volumes dealing with almost every phase of life and work in Russia. The authors are distinguished writers, all with some special knowledge of the country. The first of the series is "*How the Soviets Work*" by H. N. Brailsford. Then there are books on Russia's foreign policy, her religion, village life, economic organisation, the family, the schools, civil liberties, trade unions, national minorities, and art and culture. The series should be a valuable addition to the literature on Russia.

Russia has passed through ten years since the Bolshevik revolution. But it must be remembered that the first five of these ten years were entirely taken up in war against foreign and internal enemies and in the harder struggle against famine and blockade. A host of enemies attacked and tried to strangle her by cutting off her food supplies. For years the revolution hung in the balance and the economic life of the nation went to pieces. It is

only during the past five years that she has had comparative peace and the chance to develop her resources. But even during this period she has had to contend against the hostility of most of the governments of Europe and of the super-capitalist United States of America. Having little money to develop her resources she has been denied credits and capital abroad. If she has progressed then during these five years it has been despite these difficulties. And the testimony of all competent observers is that she has progressed and has already made good the losses of the war period of eight years. Today her production is greater than it was in 1914 when the German war broke out and it is said to be increasing rapidly.

The United States of America do not officially recognise the Soviet Government, but in spite of this official hostility, the progress that Russia is making is attracting numbers of American business men to her, and many professors and students who go to study conditions on the spot. Indeed Russia has many foreign visitors now, not the tourists who fill every corner of Western Europe, but earnest students

and enquirers ; not socialists only who go to admire, but thinking capitalists who go in search of business and to find out what this strange opponent of their time honoured ideas is like. The eastern countries are well represented in this band of enquirers—China, Persia and Afghanistan. They go to study specially the educational system, agriculture, co-operation and the military machine. During our visit to the Commissariat of Education in Moscow we were surprised to come across two high officials of the Afghan Ministry of Education—one of them an ex-student of Aligarh College.

It would be an excellent thing if our professors and students also paid visits of enquiry and studied the educational and agricultural developments in Russia. Their visits would be even more helpful to us than those of politicians. Our universities could easily arrange for a small but competent delegation for this purpose.

Our universities and others interested could also without any difficulty, unless the British government intervenes, get into touch by means of letters with educational and cultural establishments in Russia

and exchange publications with them. The Russians will welcome such co-operation and will gladly supply any information. They publish periodically pamphlets and little books in various languages, including English, showing the progress made. These will of course be entirely one-sided but they will represent the official view-point and they will give the latest figures. The Information Bureau of the Peoples' Commissariat of Education, Moscow, issues regularly statistics regarding education and annual reports.

The "Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries" issues a weekly bulletin in Russian, English, French and German, besides other publications. The address of this society is Malaya Nikitskaya 6, Moscow.\*

\* The Soviet Union Year Book, published by George Allen and Unwin, is a mine of information. The 1928 edition has recently come out.



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## CHAPTER IX

### THE PEASANTRY

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## CHAPTER IX

### THE PEASANTRY

Among the sights we saw in Moscow one of the most impressive was the Central Peasants' Home. It was an enormous building containing museums, demonstration rooms, lecture rooms and residential accommodation for about 350 persons. Practically everything that might interest or instruct the peasant was there. There was a fine display of agricultural produce, all ticketed and compared and explained. Several halls were full of the latest agricultural implements and machinery and models of up-to-date and sanitary houses and farms for the peasantry. Another part of the building was devoted to health propaganda. Pictures and posters and models explained how disease was to be avoided and homes kept clean and healthy.

A large hall was devoted solely to electricity and was full of working models showing its uses for lighting and agricultural purposes. Water pumps of various

sizes worked by electric power were much in evidence. A big chart showed the rapid development of electric power stations all over Russia. The whole display was admirably designed to impress the peasant with the advantages of electricity from his own view point.

Many peasants came to the Home and explanatory tours round the various show rooms were organised. Lectures took place daily on educational subjects of interest to the agriculturists and free legal and technical advice was given. Peasants were encouraged to stay in the Home for a maximum period of two months to go through a small course of agricultural training. The building had a restaurant attached where cheap meals were provided. We saw it crowded with rustics fresh from the country.

It was a remarkably fine institution and one felt that even one such centre must improve the lot of the peasantry. We were told however that such peasants' homes were springing up all over the Union, though most of them were much smaller than the Central Home. There was another in Moscow city for the Moscow district and there were about 350 of them in Russia

proper, excluding Ukraine and Asiatic Russia, where also there were many such homes. These hundreds of homes must transform the outlook of the peasantry to a remarkable extent within a short time.

Russia, as is well known, is pre-eminently a land of peasants, and yet the burden of the revolution fell almost entirely, in its earlier stages, on the industrial workers. The city proletariats of Lenin-grad and Moscow were the spear-heads of the revolution and the peasantry was for some time poorly represented in the Soviets. Immediate advantage however was taken by the peasantry of the Soviet decree to nationalise land, and even without the intervention of the central authority they ejected the landlords and divided the land amongst themselves. Having done so the more prosperous of them were content and had no desire for further change or more revolution. Many of them knew little about communism and cared less, and gradually they developed hostility to the Soviet power which did not view with favour the hoarding of corn and the profiteering in which the richer peasantry was indulging. The blockade of Russia by the western European

nations and the possession of some of the richest food producing areas in the south by hostile powers created a terrible crisis in the large cities and the Red army had to face starvation. Immediate and energetic steps were taken by the Soviet Government and the hoarded stores of food were commandeered from the richer peasantry.

This eased the situation but the inherent conflict between the advanced class-conscious city worker and the conservative peasantry attached to the soil, continued and ultimately the latter made its weight felt. At the instance of Lenin the whole policy of the State was suddenly changed and what is called the "New Economic Policy" was introduced. Whether Lenin was forced by circumstances to follow this line or, as some now assert, it was the natural and intended outcome of his policy, it is difficult to say. The period of militant communism could not last long but the manner of its ending certainly seemed to indicate that the pressure on the government was great.

Lenin adapted himself to the circumstances even at the cost of some of the principles of communism. He gave in to the peasantry and to the petty traders, but

his giant brain evolved a new and subtle scheme to introduce the industrial outlook amongst the peasantry. 'What is communism?' asked Lenin once, and he himself gave the strange reply that it was "The Soviet Republic plus electrification". He laid down that the whole of Russia must be electrified. It was a stupendous project, for Russia is a vast country. But already it has made good progress and Russians point with great satisfaction and pride to large maps which show the many great power stations which have sprung up all over the country.

The power of the peasantry is undoubtedly growing in Russia. The seats of authority may be filled by workers and intellectuals but little can be done against the dead weight of the disapproval of the peasantry. The controversy between the rival groups in the communist party—Stalin *v.* Trotsky—is largely concerned with the attitude to be taken up on agrarian questions. The Stalin group which is predominant to-day is apparently more amenable to compromise with the peasants than the other group.

Some people assert that a new agrarian

aristocracy is gradually being built up. There may be some such tendency but it is difficult to believe that it can go far. The whole apparatus of the State is against it, public opinion would not tolerate it and the poorest classes have too much power to permit a group to monopolise wealth and economic power. By its system of taxation the State is always trying to level incomes up as far as possible. About 25 per cent of the peasant farms are exempt from the payment of the agricultural tax and it has been proposed to exempt an additional 10 per cent. They are exempt as their income is supposed to be barely sufficient to permit the peasants working them to live decently. On the comparatively richer classes the burden of taxation is consequently all the heavier.

Land in theory belongs to the State. In practice the village Soviet divides it amongst the inhabitants, usually giving as much of it to a person as can be tilled by his family. The extent of the holding depends on the density of the population and various schemes of colonisation are afoot to equalise to some extent at least this density. An individual or family holding

## SOVIET RUSSIA

land will probably continue to hold it but if the family increases or decreases a corresponding change may be made in the size of the holding at the next re-distribution by the village Soviet.

Some figures of the agricultural output in recent years may prove interesting. It must be remembered that Russia went through six or seven years of foreign and civil war, blockade and intervention, hunger and cold, general dilapidation and a radical transformation of time honoured social traditions. The whole machinery of the State was upset and re-cast. There was a continuous fall in output till 1921-22 when the tide turned. During this period of war and decline the peasantry lost about 30 per cent of able-bodied man power and there was a great destruction of live-stock and implements. Cattle raising went down to 40 per cent and the area under cultivation dropped from 109 million dessiatines<sup>1</sup> in 1914 to 75 million in 1922. These figures are taken from the report presented by Rykoff, the Chairman of the Council of Peoples' Commissars, to the tenth anniversary session

1. A dessiatine is equal to about  $2\frac{3}{4}$  acres.

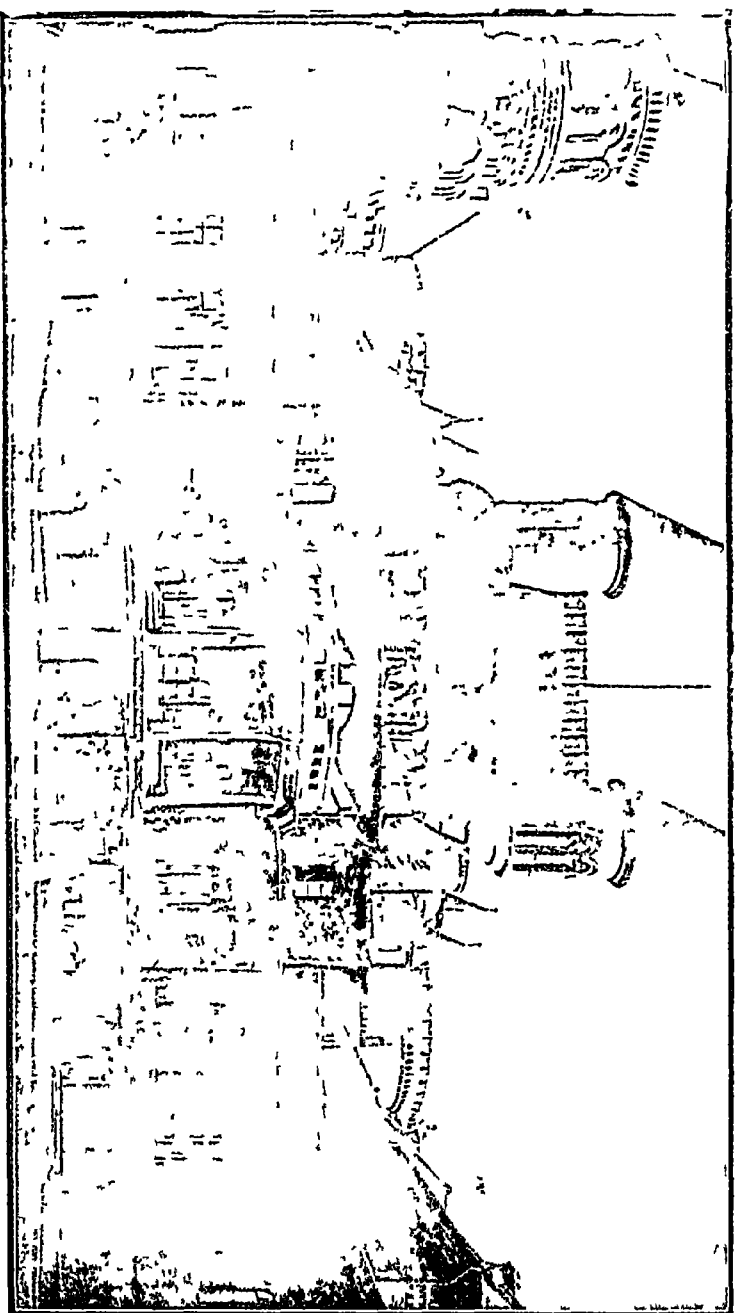
of the Central Executive Committee of the U. S. S. R. in October, 1927. Rykoff also gave the following figures of the aggregate value of agricultural output :—

In 1913	11,790 million roubles <sup>1</sup>		
1921	6,900	„	„
1926-27	12,776	„	„
Estimate for 1927-28	13,186	„	„

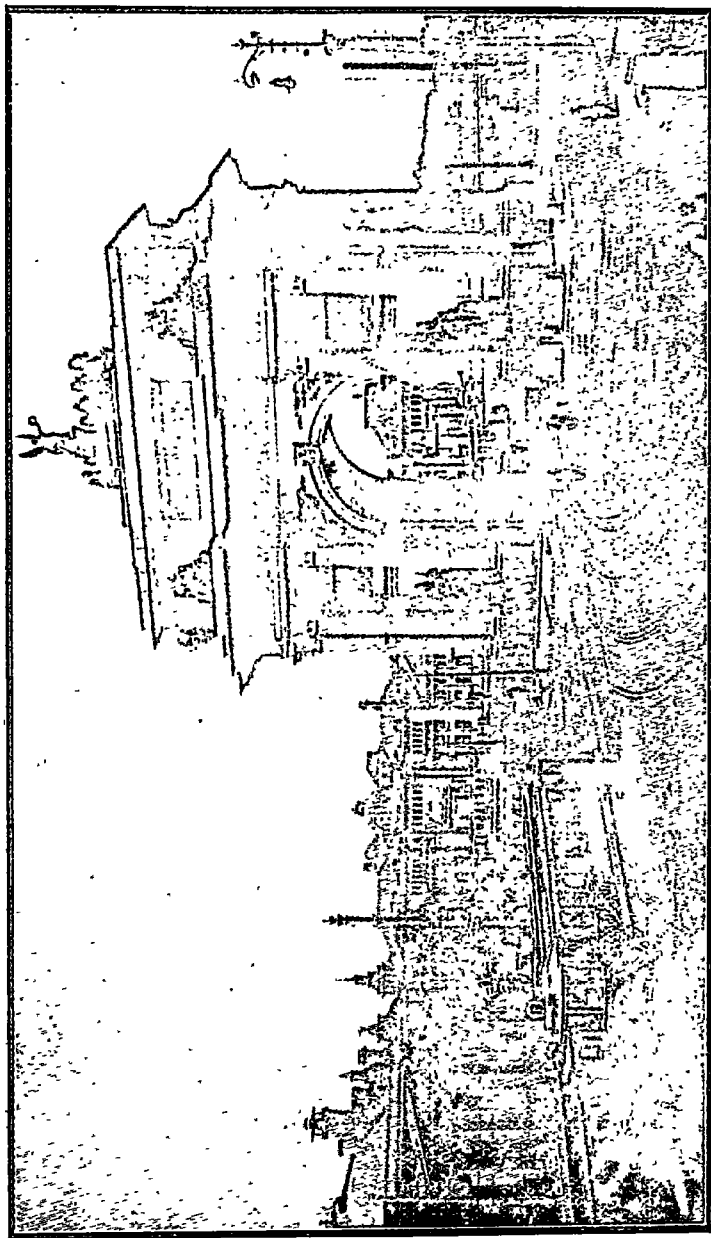
Thus inspite of the great fall in 1921 the pre-war level had already been reached and exceeded last year. The pre-war level of the area under cultivation and of cattle raising was also reached in 1927. The Central Government is investing large amounts of capital in agricultural improvements. In 1926-27 the figure was 418 million roubles ; in 1927-28 it was proposed to invest 520 million roubles.

These figures, and they are supported by independent testimony, indicate rapid progress. The progress is remarkable when the manifold difficulties and the lack of aid from outside are considered.

1. A rouble is roughly equivalent to 2 English shillings or Rs. 1/5/4.



The Pokrovskoe-Strechevo Palace, Moscow—now a Museum



A Triumphal Arch in Moscow

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## CHAPTER X

### CRIMINAL LAW

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## CHAPTER X

### CRIMINAL LAW

Nothing is perhaps more confusing to the student of Russia than the conflicting reports that come of the treatment of prisoners and of the criminal law. We are told of the Red Terror and ghastly and horrible details are provided for our consumption; we are also told that the Russian prison is an ideal residence where any one can live in comfort and ease and with a minimum of restraint. Our own visit to the chief prison in Moscow created a most favourable impression on our minds. Probably there is a measure of truth in both the statements. But before we examine the practise it is desirable to study the theory of the criminal law in Russia. It may be that there is a great divergence between theory and practice, but the former will at least tell us what ideals the Russians have placed before themselves.

The new Criminal Code came into force

on the 1st January 1927 in the R. S. F. S. R., that is, in Russia proper. I do not know if it applies to the other republics of the Union. Before 1927 the tribunals had a few decrees to guide them but were generally supposed to decide on grounds of common sense and equity. These tribunals were composed of workmen and peasants.

Under the new Code both the judge and the jury have to be chosen from men who enjoy political rights under the constitution of the U. S. S. R. Thus they must be workers, either manual or intellectual. Capitalists, persons living on rent and nep men (those who under the new economic policy practise a modified form of capitalism) and the like, are thus excluded. The tribunal is presided over by a judge elected for one year by the local soviet of workers and peasants. He is helped by two jury men chosen apparently also by the local soviet, that is by all the voters in the area. These jury men are constantly changed as each person serves once a year only for six days at most. Thus great numbers of workers take part in the working of the tribunals. It was estimated

that in 1926-27 over 500,000 workers and peasants helped the judges in this way throughout Russia.

Lenin specially desired that as many people as possible, and specially the poorest inhabitants of the country, should assist in the administration of justice. He declared that the Soviet power must call these poor people to help in the tribunals so that they may participate in the government of the country and thus should identify themselves with the State. In this way they would quickly learn the science of political power.

The idea of "punishment" is not approved of in the Soviet Code and the word itself has been replaced by a phrase "measures of social defence." There is a strict prohibition against the infliction of physical suffering or the doing of anything which lessens human dignity. Article 9 of the Code says :

"The measures of social defence do not have for their object the infliction of physical suffering or the lowering of human dignity, nor are they meant to avenge or to punish<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> This might be contrasted with article 978 of the United Provinces Jail Manual: "Labour in a jail should be con-

Crime, according to the Soviet Criminal Law, is always the outcome of the antagonisms existing in a society divided into classes; it is always the result of a faulty social organisation and a bad environment.

These ideas about punishment and crime were first put forward and discussed in some detail by an Italian, Enrico Ferri. But no state, with the exception of Soviet Russia, has so far incorporated them in its criminal code.

The convicts can thus more or less be called *detenus*, and the Soviet penitentiary system is based on the collective work of these *detenus*. Another method is compulsory work without the complete deprivation of liberty. The latter is the usual form for all except those who have committed serious offences.

The measures of social defence need not necessarily be applied to every act mentioned in the code as being against social order. If in reality there is no danger, or the delinquent cannot be considered

red primarily as a means of punishment and not of *loyment* only; neither should the question of its being *remunerative* have much weight, the object of paramount importance being that prison work should be irksome laborious and a cause of dread to evil-doers."

dangerous to society the tribunal need not apply these measures to him. It may be also that the act committed though originally dangerous may have ceased to be so. Thus during the blockade of 1928, when there was great scarcity of food, the faking of false bread cards was a serious offence. In 1927 however there was no such scarcity and the offence had little meaning. Probably a tribunal would not punish any one now for having committed this offence even formerly.

The death penalty was abolished by the Soviet soon after they came to power, but only a few days later they had to reinstate it for acts of treason. It has also been applied in cases of corruption and embezzlement of public funds. Article 21 of the Code now states that :

"The penalty of death is a temporary measure of repression for the most serious crimes which threaten the very basis of the Soviet power and the proletarian State; it is only applied in exceptional cases of defence pending its total abolition."

A proviso lays down that no pregnant women, and no one who had not attained the age of 18 at the time he committed the crime, can suffer the death penalty.

The measures taken by the state against criminals are divided into three classes :

- (1) Repressive.
- (2) Medical treatment.
- (3) Pedagogic treatment.

The last named is for children and the young. The law forbids absolutely all judicial measures of correction for children up to the age of 14. From 14 to 16 such measures can only be taken on the report of a special commission, consisting of a doctor and an educationist, and if it is found that medical or pedagogic treatment will have no effect.

The various repressive measures taken by the state are :

1. The death penalty.
2. The criminal is declared an enemy of the workers, is deprived of his citizenship of the U. S. S. R., and is banished. Persons thus banished by the judgment of a court cannot enter the territories of the U. S. S. R. at their own will ; should they do so they risk the penalty of death.
3. The deprivation of liberty for a period not exceeding ten years.

Formerly the maximum period was five years but in 1922 this was increased to ten. In reality few convicts or detenus have to remain in jail ten years. By a system of remissions for work done the period of ten years can be reduced by two or three years.

4. Compulsory labour without total deprivation of liberty. The person condemned is not kept in detention all the time. He can go on leave. For the peasants compulsory leave is given during the harvesting season and other periods when agricultural work has to be done.
5. Loss of civic rights.
6. Banishment for a period from the U. S. S. R.
7. Deportation from the R. S. F. S. R. (Russia proper) or from any other republic in the Union, with or without the obligation to live in a particular place.
8. For officials dismissal, with or without a prohibition to occupy a particular post.

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9. Prohibition to practise a particular profession.
10. Confiscation, total or partial, of goods.
11. Public blame.
12. Fine.

The Code lays down that in place of fine there can be no imprisonment, and no fine in place of imprisonment.

It is also laid down that counter-revolutionary crimes or treason include any acts against another workers' state even though it may not belong to the U. S. S. R. Russians of course pride themselves on not being national in the narrow sense. They believe in the international solidarity of workers and their slogan is not "Russians unite" but "workers of the world unite."

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## CHAPTER XI

A PRISON

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## CHAPTER XI

### A PRISON

During our stay in Moscow we had occasion to visit a prison on the outskirts of the city. We were told that it was meant for the more serious offenders only. The building was an old one—it used to be a Czarist prison—and was not prepossessing. On entering it we found ourselves in a lobby with many corridors radiating from it with cells on either side. There were three stories. We were asked by the governor of the prison to choose the cells we wished to see so that we might not think that we had been shown selected cells. The insistence on our choosing the cells ourselves was rather curious and seemed to indicate that the whole prison was more or less of a show place, specially meant for the edification of visitors.

We went inside some cells. They were narrow and uncomfortable with two or three cots in each. There appeared to be little ventilation but this was apparently avoided

as much as possible owing to the great cold. The cells were not particularly clean or tidy. They had a number of books and in two cells we saw radio sets which we were told had been fitted up by the prisoners concerned.

There were over 450 prisoners most of them sentenced for the graver offences to long terms of imprisonment—the longest being ten years, which was usually reduced by two or three years for good work and good conduct. The whole prison staff consisted of about 52 or 53 persons including the governor and the surgeon and his assistants. This number worked in three shifts of 8 hours a day each. Thus at one time there were not more than 17 or 18 members of the staff on duty. This seemed a small number specially as there were no convict warders. We were told that to appoint prisoners to watch other prisoners was considered very objectionable. We also noticed that the warders had no arms, not even sticks. Only two men at the principle entrance had bayonets.

The governor of the prison informed us that the idea underlying the prison system was not to punish or to make an example

of the offender but to separate him from society and improve him by making him work in a disciplined manner. Indeed the very word "prison" was not favoured as it savoured too much of old methods of vengeance and punishment. Instead, a long name, which I forget, but which signified a place for improvement by means of work, or some such thing, was given. The idea was that the human element in the prisoners must not be crushed. No numbers were given to them and as far as we could see no special dress was prescribed. We saw 25 to 30 prisoners walking about in the prison yard during an interval in their working hours and there appeared to be nothing in their dresses to distinguish them. In this yard some games could be played, including basket ball.

We asked if fetters and handcuffs were used. The governor laughed and said that they kept these articles in their museums, and if we wanted to see them used we ought to go to bourgeois countries! Even when prisoners were taken outside the jail handcuffs or fetters were not used.

All the prisoners had to work 8 hours a day. A few did special work for which

they might have been previously trained, but most of them worked in a textile factory attached to the jail. A great part of the jail was converted into a spinning and weaving factory and the machines were working away at full pressure. Inside this factory there was hardly any evidence of the jail, except the presence of one unarmed warder at the entrance to each hall, who kept the door locked.

We were told that as far as possible trade union rules applied to the jail workers, hours of work etc., and apparently the trade unions occasionally inspected them for the purpose. The workers were given wages which were between 30 per cent and 50 per cent of the trade union rates of wages outside. Two-thirds of these wages were kept in a reserve fund for the prisoner and he was not allowed to touch them. On being discharged this money as well as any other that may lie to his credit was given to him, so that he may have something to start life afresh. One third of his earnings could be spent by the prisoner in buying anything available in the jail store or even from outside when feasible. We saw this store. It was in charge of a prisoner and contained cigar-

ettes, articles of food and the toilet etc. Books could be purchased. No cash was given to the prisoners but they could sign vouchers in making purchases and the jail office adjusted the accounts. Friends or relatives outside could send money or goods to prisoners.

Prisoners were permitted to smoke at any time and could speak to each other. There was a barber's shop inside the jail fitted up like any cheap barber's shop in a working class quarter of a city. It was run by a prisoner who earned money by his work there. The prisoners visiting him paid him out of their own earnings. We watched a prisoner being shaved and at the end an Eau-de-Cologne spray was given.

We asked if there were any political prisoners. We were taken to two. One of them told us that he had been sentenced to ten years for spying in Russia on behalf of Czecho-Slovakia. He was a well educated man and a good musician. Hence he had been made the director of music in the jail. When we entered his cell he was actually writing the musical score of a piece. He had a wireless set in his cell which he had fitted up himself out of his

earnings.

The second political prisoner we were taken to was a Russian who had been sentenced for a very grave offence. He had been an aviator in the Red Army and during the civil wars when numerous attempts were made by old Russian generals, with the assistance of the allied governments, to break the Soviet power, he deserted the Red Army and flew over with his aeroplane to the enemy. He was later captured and sentenced to death, the sentence being subsequently commuted to 10 years. He had already served 3 or 4 years and he was hoping to get off in another 3 or 4 years. He had been put in charge of the electric fittings of the jail. He also had a radio set in his cell and a number of books.

As we were very much pressed for time we were unable to see as much of the jail as we wanted to. We had an impression that we had been shown the brighter side of jail life. None the less two facts stood out. One was that we had actually seen desirable and radical improvements over the old system prevailing even now in most countries; and the second and even more

important fact was the mentality of the prison officials and presumably the higher officials of the government also in regard to jails. Actual conditions may or may not be good but the general principles laid down for jails are certainly far in advance of any thing we had known elsewhere in practice. Any one with a knowledge of prisons in India and of the barbarous way in which hand-cuffs, fetters and other punishments are used will appreciate the difference. The governor of the prison in Moscow who took us round was all the time laying stress on the human side of jail life, and how it was their endeavour to keep this in the front and not to make the prisoner feel in any way dehumanised or outcasted. I wish we in India would remember this wholesome principle and practise it in our daily lives even outside jail.

The prison we saw was a central jail for serious offenders—those who had committed murder, high treason etc. The usual sentence was the maximum, which, apart from the death sentence, is ten years. In other jails, where the lesser offenders are sent, we were told that conditions were even more agreeable and considerable freedom

was allowed to prisoners. They are even permitted to go home for a few days on parole. In the case of peasants this leave is usually given during harvest time so that they can utilize it to the best advantage.

Miss Freda Utey has contributed an interesting article to the March number of the "Socialist Review" describing a visit to a Bolshevik prison in Georgia. It was in Tiflis. She tells us how humanely the prisoners were treated and how they were all being educated. The Russians are trying to put into practice what psychologists have discussed for years past and their prison system instead of brutalising offenders, tends to change them into good citizens. Crime is regarded as the result of bad environment and lack of education and understanding. Criminals are therefore treated as "victims of economic circumstances or as sick and ignorant people who have to be taken into an institution to be trained to live in society."

If this account is correct, and if what we saw ourselves truly represents the state of prisons in the Russian Union, it can be said without a shadow of a doubt that to

be in a Russian prison is far preferable than to be a worker in an Indian factory, whose lot is 10 to 11 hours work a day and then to live in a crowded and dark and airless tenement, hardly fit for an animal. The mere fact that there are some prisons like the ones we saw is in itself something for the Soviet government to be proud of.

In considering this question however we should bear in mind two facts. The Soviet government has a special and a ruthless way of treating its political opponents and all those whom it may suspect of counter-revolutionary activities. The humane principles of the general criminal law are not supposed to apply to them as they are considered to be the enemies of society. These people have been treated badly and in some cases very cruelly in the past and hence many of the stories of the Red Terror and Bolshevik tyranny. Extreme cases of such treatment may not occur now except when a war scare frightens Moscow, but even now the hand of the Soviet government lies heavily on all its political opponents. Thus we have the general law of the land applied humanely to the great majority of the population say

95 per cent; and 5 per cent or so being suspected and watched and treated badly. The ordinary worker and peasant is probably very much better off; the relics of Tsarism and some individuals who are too independent for the government are much worse off.

Another consideration to be borne in mind is the paucity of funds at the disposal of the Bolsheviks. They want to spend every thing they have on industrial development, on education and agriculture. They have no desire to spend it on erecting large prisons. They say that they hope to abolish most of the prisons by their better organisation of society. Why then waste money on prisons? For the present they carry on with the old Tsarist prisons. In Moscow and in the larger cities these prisons may be in tolerable condition, but probably in the provinces they are not at all presentable. And the Soviet government will not spend money on improving them. Hence probably the accounts of bad conditions in some of these jails.

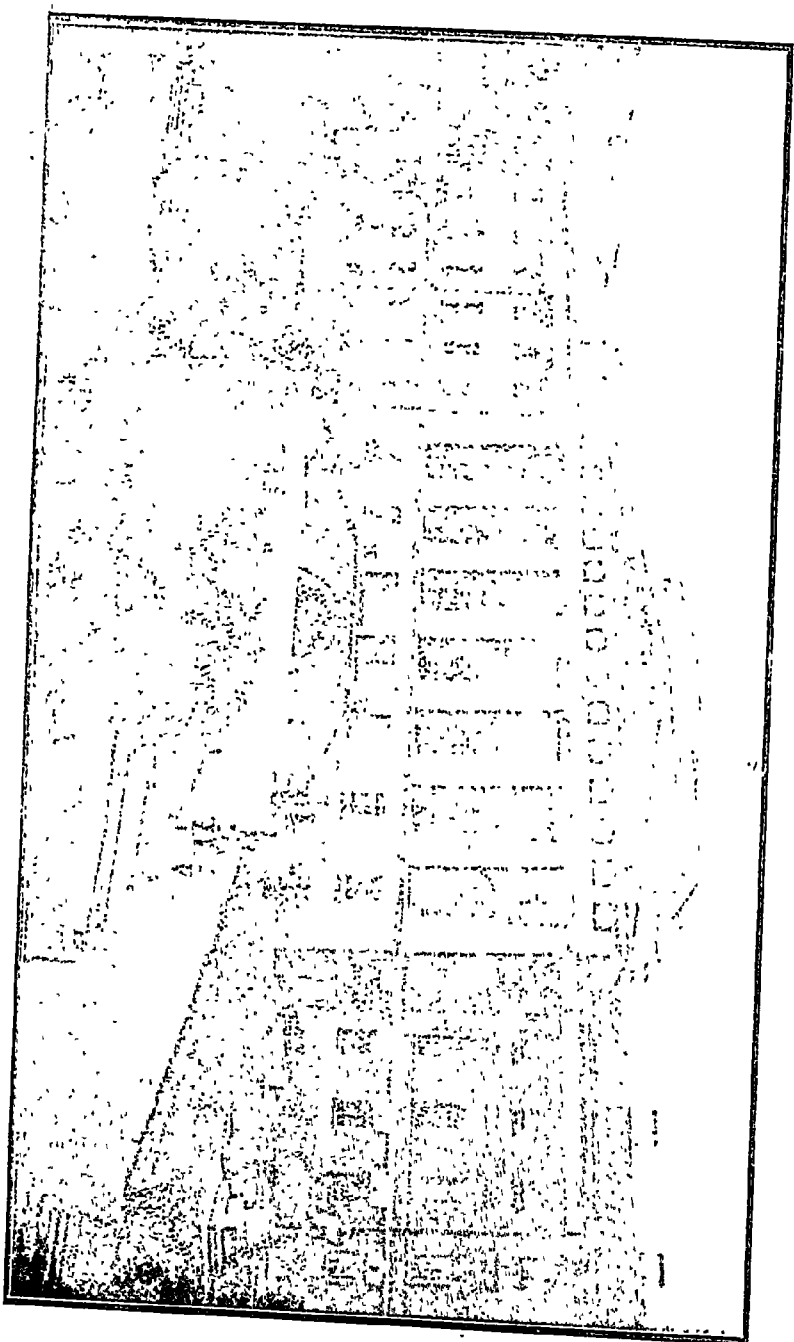
But the ideal of a better social order and a humane criminal law which inspires the Soviet functionary in a prison or out-

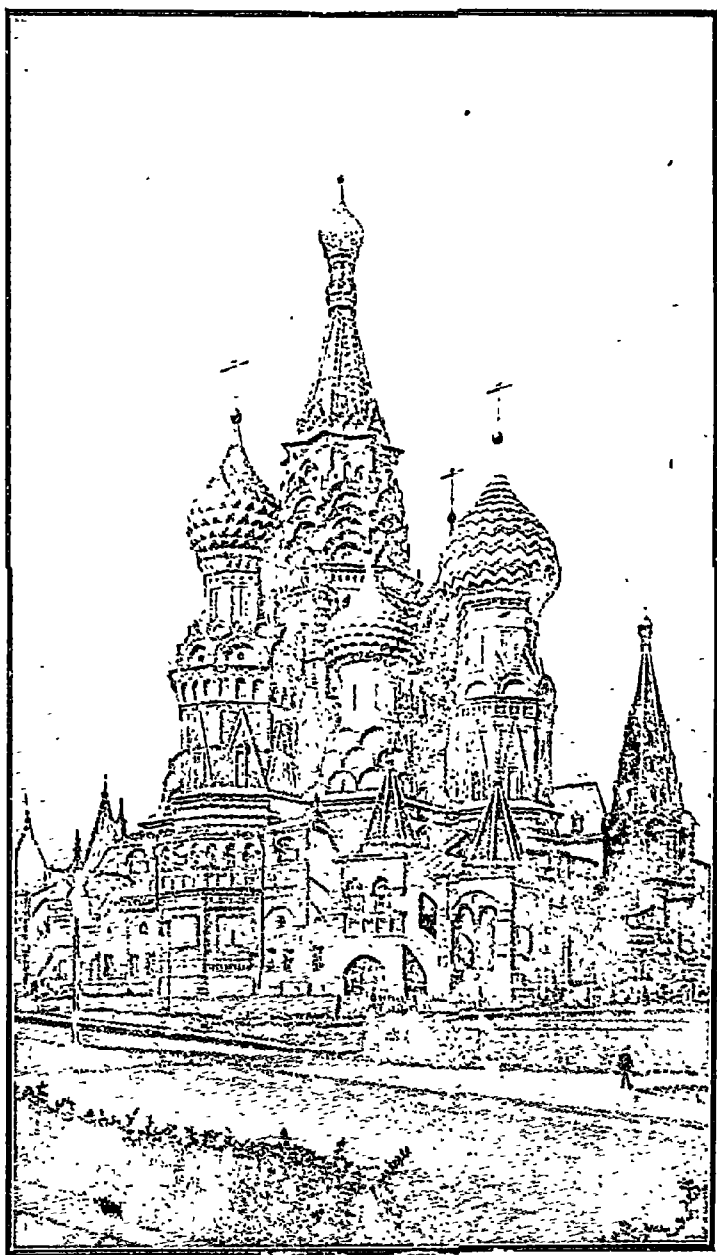
## S O V I E T   R U S S I A

side is something far more important than bricks and mortar and a better jail building. If that ideal endures Russia will make good despite all difficulties.



Palace of Labour, Moscow





The Chapel of Saint Basil, Moscow—now a  
Museum

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## CHAPTER XII

### THE PROBLEM OF MINORITIES

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## CHAPTER XII

### THE PROBLEM OF MINORITIES

Many of us are apt to imagine that India is particularly unfortunate in having to face a complicated problem of minorities and different communities. As a matter of fact many other countries have faced and solved this problem. Russia specially is a country with numerous national minorities with different languages and cultures, and it is interesting and instructive for us to study the methods of the Bolsheviks in regard to these minorities.

In Czarist Russia there were about 140 different nationalities who did not speak Russian. There were twenty nationalities of one million each; the Turco-Tartars numbered 20 millions; the Ukrainians 25 to 30 millions, the Poles 8 millions, and the Jews 7 millions. The non-Russian speaking nationalities were 57 per cent of the total population.

The old policy, under the Czar, was to pitch one nationality against the other. At-

tempts were made to 'Russianise' aliens by bringing them into the Russian church. Any person, belonging to these minority groups, who aspired to become a professor had to change his religion and enter the orthodox church. The teaching of minority languages was not encouraged and sometimes was actively repressed. In 1831 under a decree of the Czar all Polish schools were closed; only the religious schools of the Jews and Moslems were permitted to continue. Thus these minority communities became very backward.

Soon after the October Revolution in 1917 the 2nd All Russia Congress of Soviets made the following declarations :—

- (1) Equality and sovereignty of peoples of Russia.
- (2) Right of self-determination even to separation and formation of an independent state.
- (3) Abolition of all and every kind of national, racial and religious privileges.
- (4) Free development of national minorities and ethnographic groups.

The Russian Union—the U. S. S. R.—is a federation of six constituent republics.

Some of these republics are themselves federations and have besides many autonomous areas. Thus each considerable minority inhabiting a particular area has a great deal of autonomy and can develop its own language and culture. It is the policy of the Central Government not only to leave these republics and autonomous areas to work along their own lines but to help them actively to develop their resources and cultures. Schools conducted in the local languages are opened ; an attempt is made to carry on public activities, work in Soviets etc., in the language of the area ; and newspapers are published in these languages.

A distinction is made between the political rights and the cultural rights of a minority group. So far as the former are concerned they have the same rights as any other minority community or as the majority. They are not specially protected or given any weightage or separate representation, except in so far as a whole area may be made into an autonomous area. In cultural matters however much more freedom is given to them and their rights are specially protected. The Central Government feels that so long as there are backward communities in the

Union the progress of the whole Union will be retarded, and hence the stress on levelling up of these groups.

In 1926-27 the primary schools, specially meant for different national groups, in one of the constituent republics—the R. S. F. S. R. alone (but including northern Caucasus)—amounted to :

For Turkish nationality ..	1197
„ Ugro-Finns ..	1810
„ people with western culture	1272
„ Mongols and Manchurians	233
„ North Caucasus ..	788
„, people of the north ..	36

The school books are prepared in the different languages. Indeed primary instruction is given now in 62 different languages in the Union, and books and papers are issued in 52 languages. In August 1927 the newspapers of the national minorities in the Soviet Union numbered 201 with a total circulation of 9,28,580 copies.

Prior to the revolution many nationalities had no regular written language *e.g.*, the Mordwa, Clmyks, Oirats, and the South Siberian peoples. The Soviet Government had new scripts prepared for

16 such groups, and it reformed many other scripts and made them simpler and more scientific.

Attempts have been made in the eastern republics to follow up the building of schools conducted in the native language by introducing this language in the local soviets and public institutions. This is specially succeeding in Tartaristan. In the village soviets of Tartaristan the Tartar language has been adopted at the following rate:

1922	1923	1924	1925
20	50	80	85

The town soviets have made similar progress.

During the last two or three years special steps have been taken to prepare teachers for higher education in the non-Russian languages. For this purpose 28 linguistic departments were opened up to last year in the higher schools. These departments will give a regular supply of graduates after a few years.

The Commissariat of Education also sets aside a number of places to train young people in languages, customs of nationalities, etc. The numbers of these during

the last few years were:—

In	1923	..	..	991
„	1924	..	..	1034
„	1925	..	..	1777
„	1926	..	..	1283

Of these 236 men were Turco-Tartars.

Women in some of these eastern republics are making great progress. In Uzbekistan before the revolution women were mostly purdanashins, seldom literate and in a state of half slavery. Now in this republic of Central Asia there are 276 women's educational institutions with 13,200 students. Of all the students of the national minorities 20 per cent last year were women. They are specially attracted to educational work, and also to medicine.

It is difficult to draw any final conclusions about anything Russian at this stage, but it would certainly appear from the progress made in the last five years that the problem of minorities has been largely solved there. This does not mean that complete equality has been established and there are no evils left. Rykoff, the Prime Minister of the Russian Union, stated last year that although much progress had been made, much still re-

remained. They had not succeeded in uprooting serfdom, ignorance and superstition. By decree they had established the complete equality of all nationalities in the Union. but in practice this was not fully done. Full equality could only come with the removal of economic and cultural differences. Nor could women be free till they attained economic freedom also.

Rykoff is certainly right in drawing attention to all that has not been done. But the successes already achieved are great enough and show that properly tackled the problem of minorities can be solved with rapidity and ease. The hundred and fifty years of British rule in India compare very badly in this respect with this effort. But, may we whisper it? the British do not want the problem to be solved.



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## CHAPTER XIII

### EDUCATION

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## CHAPTER XIII

### EDUCATION

The new Russia is a fascinating study from many points of view. But to an Indian the most interesting and instructive aspect of her new policy is probably her attitude to education and specially her gallant fight against illiteracy. Enormous agricultural areas with an almost illiterate peasantry offer problems for solution which are not dissimilar to ours. An eminent educationist of America, Dr. Lucy L. W. Wilson, has written a little book on the "New Schools of New Russia" which gives us some idea of how the Soviet government is trying to solve these problems. This book is one of the excellent studies of Soviet Russia which the Vanguard Press of New York are publishing.

The first impression that one gathers from this study, and from all accounts of Russia, is of the enormous importance that is attached to the education of youth by the Bolshevik leaders and rank and file.

All the world over there is a realisation that only through right education can a better order of society be built up. In Russia the leaders today have no doubt as to what this future order should be and afire with their ideals they have set themselves out to realise it in their own time. They have concentrated their great energy on the training of the youth of the country, and their ablest men and women have been charged with this task. Within a few days of the October revolution, with civil war raging in the heart of Petrograd and every one predicting the speedy collapse of the Bolsheviks, they had time to announce their educational programme. Later, with amazing audacity, they proclaimed that they would put an end to illiteracy in the whole country within ten years. It was not merely a pious wish. They laid down a definite programme not only for the education of the youth but to "liquidate illiteracy," as they called it, in the adult population.

They failed in their endeavour. The fates were against them. Civil war continued, and the wars of the intervention, and famine and blockade ravaged the country

and reduced it to a pitiful condition. But although they failed to liquidate illiteracy they have shown remarkable results within these ten years.

A second outstanding feature of Russian education is the relation which exists between the school and the every day world. Education is not something in the air, cut off from the daily life of the student or from his future work as a citizen. Real education, it is felt, must be based on the actual environment and experiences of the child and it must fit him for the work he will have to do in after life. In order therefore to plan an intelligent curriculum, one of the leading educationists made a thorough study of an industrial region and an agricultural region. It is being continually pressed on all teachers that they must keep in intimate touch with the life conditions of their pupils so as to be able to adopt their curricula to them.

This necessitates that the medium of instruction should be the mother tongue. The Soviet Union has a far greater diversity of peoples and languages than India has, but in spite of the difficulties involved,

this principle has been rigidly adhered to. For every different language group in the Union schools use the particular language of that group. Sometimes in the same city the language of instruction in different schools is different. Efforts are made to develop in every way the local languages. The soviets in different areas are encouraged to carry on their work in the language of the region. Official newspapers and books are published in those languages and special institutes have been opened in Leningrad and Moscow and elsewhere to train teachers in the various languages. There are at present 45 such institutes. The big universities have special faculties for national minorities. This desire to encourage the culture of the minorities has been carried so far that where there were only spoken dialects and no written languages, new scripts have been evolved. When we visited the Education Department at Moscow we were shown many school books in a variety of scripts, some resembling the Persian script, others entirely unknown to us.

An extreme example may perhaps convey some idea of the length to which

the Soviet government is carrying this policy. There is a small tribe in the Irkutsk region of Siberia. It is called the Karagass tribe and in all it numbers 405, including infants. They speak a variant of the Turkish language and are a nomad people living chiefly by hunting. Even for the children of those people a special school was opened. It is attended in winter only as the pupils accompany their parents in their summer wanderings. Another nomad people, the Gypsies, have three schools and an attempt is being made to produce a "Gypsy Speller." This has not been easy as there is no Gypsy alphabet.

The names of some of the other national minorities in the Soviet Union might be of interest. They are the Poles, Ukrainians, Latvians, Esthonians, Germans, Finns, Hebrews, Armenians, White Russians, Samoyeds, Ostiaks, Mongolians, Yakuts, Tartars, Bashkirs, Tungas, Buryats, Yukagirs, Kamtchadols, Esquimos, Kirghiz, Hakassians, Oirats, Tchuvash, Komi, Mari, Kalmuck, Ingush, Mordvans, Assyrians in Northern Caucasus, and Koreans. This is not meant to be a com-

plete list.

As this article is written the newspapers announce that the Leningrad Academy of Science has founded an institute for the study of Buddhist culture. The institute is compiling an encyclopedia of Buddhism, and an international Congress for the study of Buddhist culture is going to be convened.

It is interesting to note that in many of the outlying republics of the Russian Union, for instance amongst the Tartars and Bashkirs, women, who till lately were in purdah, are being trained as teachers.

A third feature of Soviet education, which necessarily follows from the principle of communism, is its organisation for the masses. In most countries the better type of education is a monopoly of the well-to-do in private schools. In Russia an attempt is made to give this education to all. And it is based on the principle that education must be collective or co-operative, that is, the goal is not merely the acquisition of knowledge and individual skill but the ability to give to others and to take from them. Krupskaya, the widow of Lenin and a leading educationist, has

stated in this connection that " The collective principle is both the point of departure and the final aim of every educational process. This principle runs through it like a red thread. Except through the collective organisation of the children there is no social education. . . . . This principle is its base, its essence and its content."

Education in the days of the Czar was largely in the hands of the orthodox church. Its purpose was to teach loyalty to the Czar and the Church and, as in India, to provide clerks for government offices. The "lower classes" were not encouraged to rise above their station. A Czarist minister of education laid it down that "the children of coachmen, servants, cooks, laundresses and such like people should not be encouraged to rise above the sphere to which they were born." Children were taught the following catechism :

*Question* : What does religion teach us as our duty to the Czar ?

*Answer* : Worship, fidelity, payment of taxes, service, love and prayer; the whole being com-

prised in the words worship  
and fidelity.

The first decrees of the Soviet department of education provided for the *séparation* of the school from the church; co-education, and the encouragement of non-Russian nationalities to organise schools in their own languages. It was further laid down that a pre-school education for children from three to seven years, elementary education from eight to twelve years, and secondary education from thirteen to sixteen were all free, obligatory and universal; and in addition it was proclaimed that every Russian citizen was entitled to higher education. It is presumed that the social education of all children up to fifteen or sixteen is the affair of the state and not of the family. The aim of this education has been stated to be :

“To promote the all-round development of an individual who shall be healthy, strong, active, courageous, independent in thought and action, with a many-sided culture; an efficient person striving for the interest of the working class, which is ultimately for the interest of the whole of humanity.”

Education therefore begins at the age of three. Before that the child, and indeed

the pregnant mother; is the responsibility of the department of health. Pregnant women workers are released from all work, with full wages, three or four months before and after child birth and are entitled to receive free medical aid. The mother is further given sufficient time daily during work hours to nurse her baby, who is kept in crèches attached to the place of work.

Every factory and trade union contributes to a culture fund which finances crèches, nursery schools, kindergartens and children's play grounds. In the pre-schools special attention is paid to hygiene, food and sleep, and the curriculum includes play, stories, excursions, music, art and drama. An attempt is made even at this early age to encourage co-operative habits in the children. In the last few years about 10,000 of these pre-schools have been started, but of course they can only serve a small proportion of the population.

The Trade Unions also contribute 10 per cent of their income to adult education, and in their collective agreements with employers there is a special clause which requires the latter to pay 1 per cent of the

total wages bill to this fund.

Elementary and secondary education is conceived of as a whole, the school being called the "Unified Labour School" and divided into a first grade (elementary) and second grade (secondary). The full course varies from seven to nine years. There are certain special features of this school. There are no examinations for admission, and promotion takes place on the quality of the year's work, which is judged by the collective work of the group of which the student is a part. In all schools there is co-education. There are periodical medical examinations of the children and individual attention is paid to the child's capacity. Thus, weak children are exempted from heavy work; those with poor eye sight are put in the first row. The Dalton plan has been largely adopted and this involves the giving up of lecturing as a method of instruction.

Student government in schools is encouraged greatly and there are many students' organisations: Octobrists, Pioneers, Comsomol, Children's co-operatives. Students have a considerable share in drawing up the school programmes. Communists

of course firmly believe in a class war, but so far as schools are concerned Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, has stated that "student self-government cannot be a copy of the forms of the political life of adults, for, in the life of children, neither class struggle nor class domination can take place. The school is rather an embryo and a symbol of the future society without classes." But in spite of this praiseworthy ideal there is probably a good deal of friction and antagonism even in the school.

The excursion method is very largely used in the schools. One of the reasons why this has become so important a method was the paucity of equipment and books in the early years. Students are being continually taken in groups to museums, historical places, art galleries and to study nature. Sometimes longer excursions are organised to distant places and if funds are not sufficient the group tries to earn money *en route*.

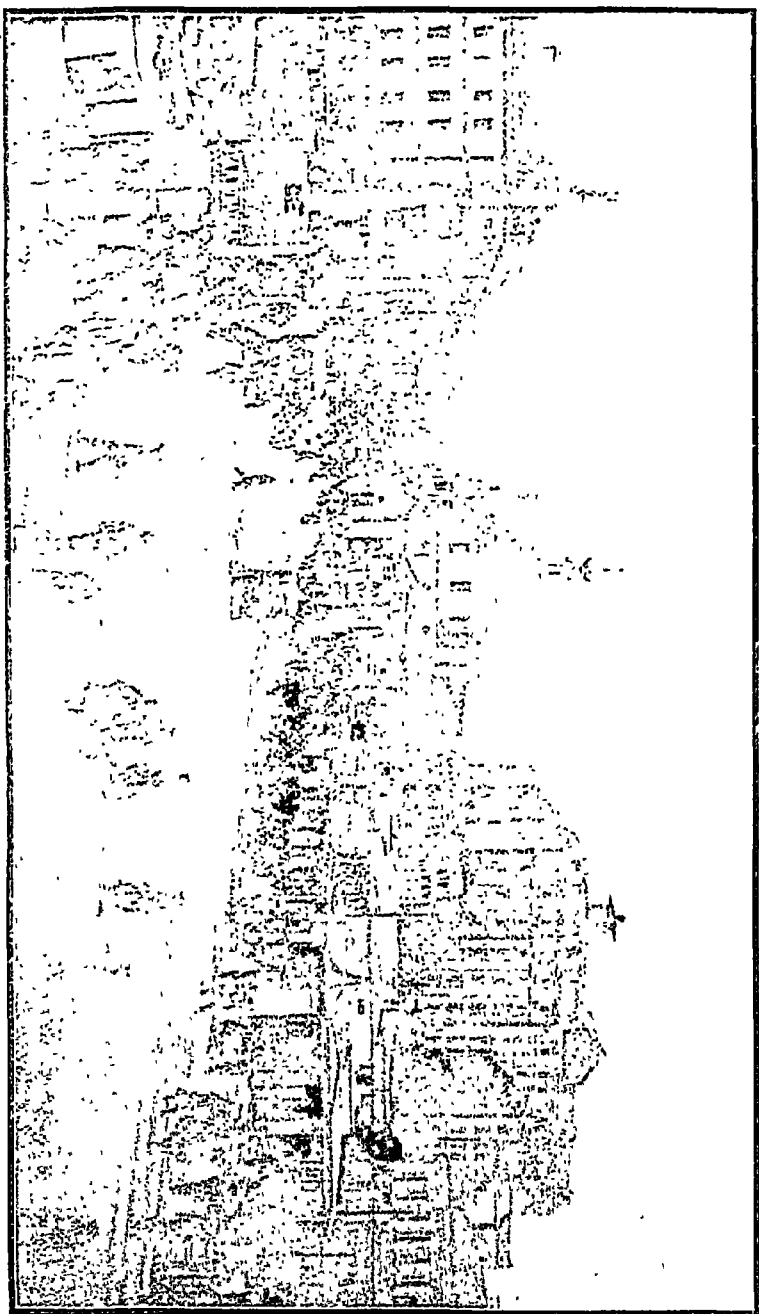
Another important method of education is what is called the complex or project. The complex is a centre of interest round which are grouped all the associated ideas. For instance the village complex would

deal with village life; crops and harvests and agricultural produce; village hygiene and social life; local trade; the inter-relation between village and town; the defects of rural life, their causes and cures; the government of the village; and the necessity for co-operation of all public workers to improve the village. In working out this complex the students are encouraged to work in the villages and put their theories into practice.

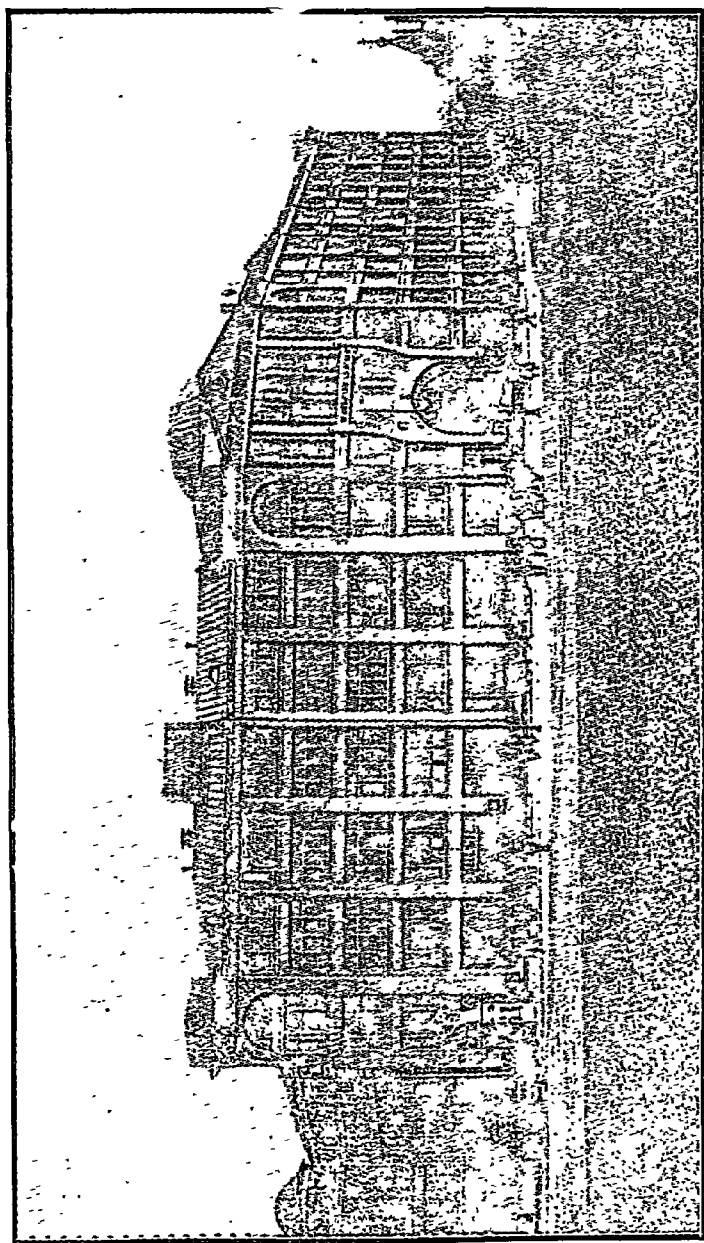
The health complex deals in some detail with the health of the individual, of the home and of the community, and tries to impress upon the student that the two former depend on the health of the community. The functions of the body, food, digestion etc. are dealt with and the harmful effects of alcohol are demonstrated.

In this way many other subjects are treated as complexes—nature, work, children's life, human relations and finally community life. The object aimed at is to produce a desire to serve the community as a whole and to apply the knowledge gained not only for personal but for public welfare.

Very detailed programmes for these



The Strastnaia Square, Moscow



The Office of the Supreme Economic Council, Moscow

complexes are issued for the teacher but it is made clear that these are for his general guidance only and he must develop his own programme in co-operation with the other teachers and the children themselves. It is pointed out that artificial tendencies and mere moralizing are to be avoided. Students are made to think for themselves and to draw their own conclusions.

Schools are influenced considerably by the neighbourhood in which they are situated, for this neighbourhood serves as a practical laboratory. In rural areas villiage conditions dominate. If situated near a particular factory that factory will influence the teaching of many subjects—geography, science, mathematics.

Education has been made universal in the urban areas but in rural areas much remains to be done. It is interesting to find however that the peasantry are beginning to take a live interest in the spread of education and in some places have constructed schools with their own hands. Another interesting fact is that according to scientific tests it has been found that the average peasant child ranks higher in intelligence than the town child. This is

probably due to their closer contact with nature and the school curriculum helps this natural development.

In some parts of Russia the land is not rich enough to support the peasants" and an additional occupation is necessary. Weaving with hand looms is prevalent and the family loom is continually being worked by some member of the family, including the children.

The growth of rural education may be partly judged by the fact that in 1913 there were only 2,800 rural letter boxes. In 1926 there were 64,000 such boxes besides travelling post offices for the outlying villages. The drivers of these moving post offices distribute agricultural goods. A "Peasants' Gazette" started in 1923 has attained a circulation of a million copies and deals with all matters relating to the peasantry. Hundreds of thousands of letters are received by it containing enquiries, complaints of officials etc., and these are investigated and, whenever necessary, action taken on them.

The soviets have used cinematograph films a great deal for educational purposes. One of their most famous artist-producers

has recently produced a film called "Village Policy." This deals with all phases of agriculture and peasant life and specially with the actual problems and difficulties of the peasant. An attempt is made to rouse the audience to face the problem and to appreciate the solution.

The Revolution was primarily the work of the town workers and the peasantry only gradually drifted into it. For long the antagonism between town and village was very evident and it was largely owing to pressure from the peasants that Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy which was a departure from the pure milk of communism. The conflict between the two ideals still continues and is an important feature of domestic policy in Russia. Those in authority are very desirous of bringing about full understanding and co-operation between the town and the village and Lenin invented a special word for this purpose, which means "dovetailing." A workers' society for the Union of City and Village was started in 1923 and it now has several million members with branches all over the country. Factory groups and workers' clubs also develop

special contacts with particular rural areas and help them in improving village conditions.

The fight against illiteracy was carried on in a variety of ways. Trade unions, workers' clubs, peasant institutes, co-operatives, prisons, were all used as educational centres. Special schools for adults, agricultural and industrial, and both daily and for Sundays only, were started. An extraordinary commission for the Liquidation of Illiteracy was established and a voluntary society—"The Down with Illiteracy Society"—with a large membership was formed. The object aimed at is not merely to teach the three Rs but to impart social knowledge and to rouse a desire to co-operate in the building up of the State. The number of libraries is increasing rapidly and each one of them has one or more study circles. There are also travelling libraries. Cheap booklets dealing with the daily problems of the peasant and the worker are issued by the million.

All this has resulted in practically abolishing illiteracy in the urban areas and amongst the industrial workers. But the peasantry is still largely unaffected. They

have been approached, apart from other methods, through the Red Army, which consists largely of peasants. For the two years during which the peasant serves in the army he is made to go through an educational course and a little before his discharge a special practical course prepares him to do educational and cultural work in his village. Large numbers of people are going through the army and returning to their village homes with some training to help in the improvement of village conditions and in the fight against illiteracy.

There are any number of special schools and institutes—research institutes, technical schools, technical short courses, workers' faculties, peasant schools, schools for defectives (deaf, blind etc.), art and music schools. One of the most important training institutions is the Institute of Psychology and Defectology. The most eminent psychologists, physicians and educationists work in this institution for child study.

For higher studies there are about a score of universities besides two special communist universities in Moscow. The

two latter are the Oriental University and the Sun Yat Sen University. They are specially meant for teaching the communist doctrines and methods of propaganda.

There was a tendency soon after the revolution to run down everything appertaining to the old regime. Even famous Russian classical authors were called bourgeois contemptuously and were not encouraged. Religion of course was a special target. Gradually these tendencies have softened and there is more tolerance. There is no active anti-religious propaganda in the schools although the whole background of education is non-religious. The letter sent by Maxim Gorky to Romain Rolland, which was recently published in the newspapers, showed that Russian authors of Tzarist days are widely read and appreciated. The Russian, even though he may be a communist, is too much of an artist not to appreciate good literature and art and music wherever they may be found.

Lenin himself was very much attached to some famous Russian classics and used to be effected powerfully by good music.

There is a story told of Lunacharsky, the present Commissar of Education, which

gives us an insight into his character. During the early days of the Revolution when civil war was waging, news came that a part of the Kremlin in Moscow was destroyed. The news turned out later to be untrue but for the moment Lunacharsky was greatly effected. With tears in his eyes he rushed up to Lenin and handed in his resignation. He could not stand, he said, the destruction of the beautiful structures created in the past. He was prevailed upon to withdraw his resignation but only after the custody of Russian art was placed in his hands. Lunacharsky, as head of the department of education, now controls libraries, museums, artistic and scientific institutions, the theatres, music, the cinematograph—practically the whole of the cultural side of Russia. A poet and a dramatist and a lover of the humanities and yet a revolutionary and a communist, he has given to the Russian educational system the wide cultural outlook which it possesses.

Another leader to whom Russian education owes much is Krupskaya, the life-partner of Lenin in his long years of tribulation and in his triumph. Even during

the years of exile she specialised in education and wrote a book on "Public Education and Democracy." She dresses very plainly and her features are heavy and somewhat unattractive, but even a few minutes' conversation with her discloses her charm. Characteristic of her were some words she addressed to the Congress of Soviets after Lenin's death :

"Comrades, men and women workers, men and women peasants : I have a great favour to ask from you. Do not pay external respect to Lenin's personality. Do not build statues in his memory. He cared for none of these things in his life. Remember there is much poverty and ruin in this country. If you want to honour the name of Lenin, build children's homes, kindergartens, schools, libraries, ambulatories, hospitals, homes for cripples and other defectives."

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CHAPTER XIV

THE PEASANT AND THE LAND

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## CHAPTER XIV

### THE PEASANT AND THE LAND

Moscow looms large in the Soviet Union. It dominates Russia and casts its shadow on the other countries of the world. But Moscow and Leningrad and the other towns are but a few islands in a sea of villages. For Russia, like India, is essentially rural and agricultural. Eighty per cent of her population live in villages and seventy five per cent of her working population is engaged in the cultivation of the soil.

Tremendous efforts have been made to industrialise the country but for long years Russia is bound to be mainly agricultural. To understand her therefore one must go to the villages and see the peasant at his work. And to measure the gains and losses of the Soviet regime one must see the difference it has made to the peasants.

But the very vastness of the country makes this enquiry very difficult. Conditions vary and what is true of the villages

near Moscow may be utterly false for more distant villages. There was indeed a report a year or two ago that a party of explorers in the Siberian forests had suddenly come across a settlement of 1500 persons entirely cut off from the rest of the world. They had not heard of the Great War; they did not know of the Russian Revolution. They thought that the Czar was still ruling them! The report is hardly credible although it appeared in a Leningrad newspaper. But whether it is fanciful or merely exaggerated it gives us some idea of the diversity of conditions in the Soviet Union.

It is well-known that serfdom existed in Russia till not long ago. The last of the edicts liberating the serfs was issued in 1863. At that date out of a total population of sixty millions nearly fifty millions were serfs of various kinds, either on state lands or on the lands of the royal family or with private landowners. During the period of serfdom the proprietor had almost complete legal power to make his serfs do what he liked and to punish them with lashes and blows. He could also send a disobedient serf to Siberia.

Emancipation did not bring great relief

to the serfs. They usually had little land and it was not good and the village was burdened with the price of the land or the rent of it which had to be paid to the old landlord. The state helped outright purchases by means of loans but the burden continued. The people who benefited most by the new arrangement were the landlords who got hard cash and freedom from all worry.

Soon after, the revolutionary movement was carried to the villages but it met with poor response there. The peasant in Russia, as in India, did not appreciate or understand vague ideas of freedom. What he wanted was land and lighter taxes and protection from oppression. We find in the stories of some famous Russian novelists descriptions of this period and how young revolutionaries were suspected by the peasantry and sometimes even handed over to the police.

After the Russo-Japanese war the peasants arose in many places and riots and disorders spread. They were put down, but not entirely, and the peasantry organised a Peasants' Union with the cry "all the land for those who labor on it."

The peasantry were helped in organising themselves by the existence of ancient village councils called "mirs." These were *panchayets*, on a highly democratic basis, often meeting in the open and discussing the local affairs of the village. They owned sometimes some common land which used to be divided up by them. There were also more formal and official local bodies called the "zemstvos" which came into existence after the emancipation. The franchise for these was based on property and they were thus usually controlled by the landlords. They may be compared in their functions and activities to the present District Boards in India.

The war hit the peasantry the hardest. The army absorbed their best men and it is said that seven millions of them died or were maimed. Fields remained uncultivated and where man had fought for long years against the forest and had gradually driven it back, the forest advanced again triumphantly and undid the work of generations. Strange forces began to move the great masses and the cry arose, ever more insistent, of "peace and land"—to which the town people added "bread".

The peasants held aloof from the Bolsheviks during the early days of the revolution. But without the help of the peasantry Bolshevism was doomed to defeat. Ultimately Lenin won over the Peasants' Congress. But even before this the peasants had taken the law into their own hands and had expropriated the landlords themselves and taken possession of the land.

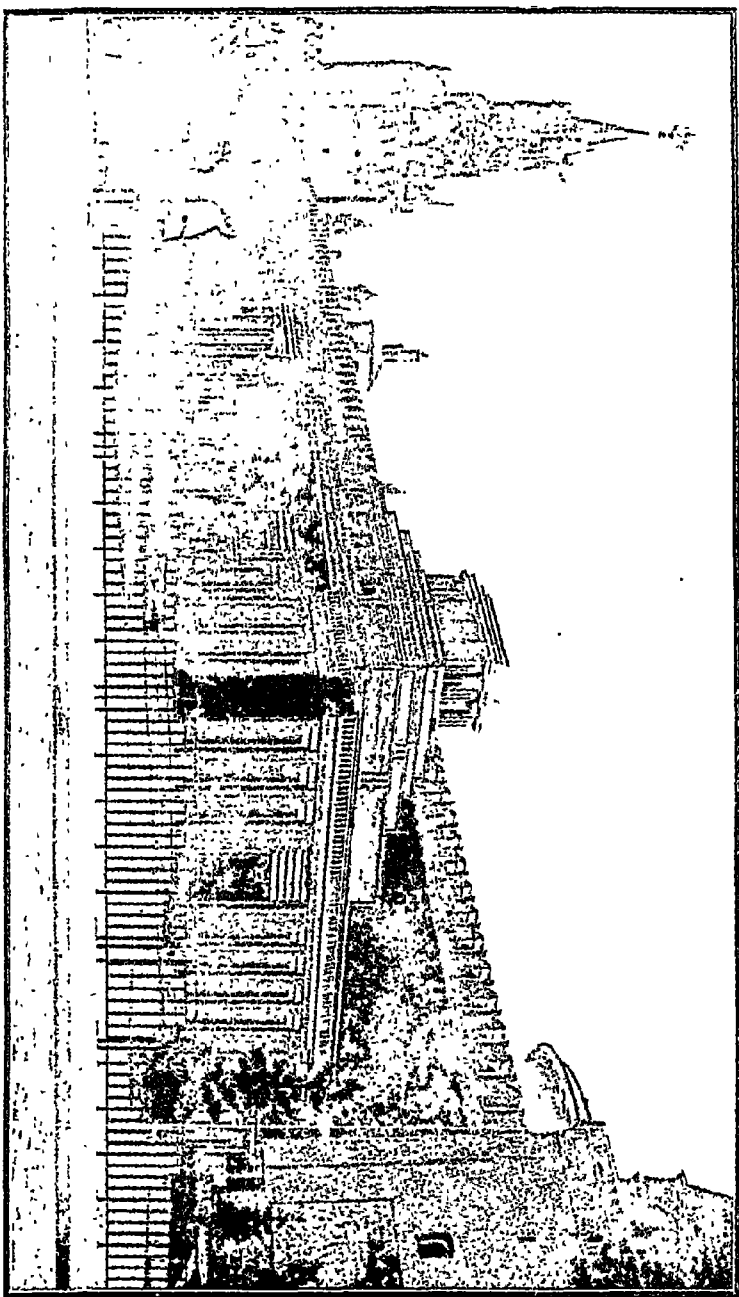
The civil war that followed with its bands of adventurers attacking the Soviet government with foreign money and munitions was a time of sore trial for the peasantry. Fearful of losing again their land, which they had acquired after so much toil and suffering, they rallied to the Soviet government, and it was largely with their help that the Soviet triumphed. But the war was followed by famine and disease and it was on this scene of horror and destruction that the work of reconstruction had to begin.

The earliest decrees of the Soviet government dealt with the nationalisation of land. Land could not be "bought, sold, rented, given as security, or expropriated by any means whatever." "The right to enjoy the land is accorded, without

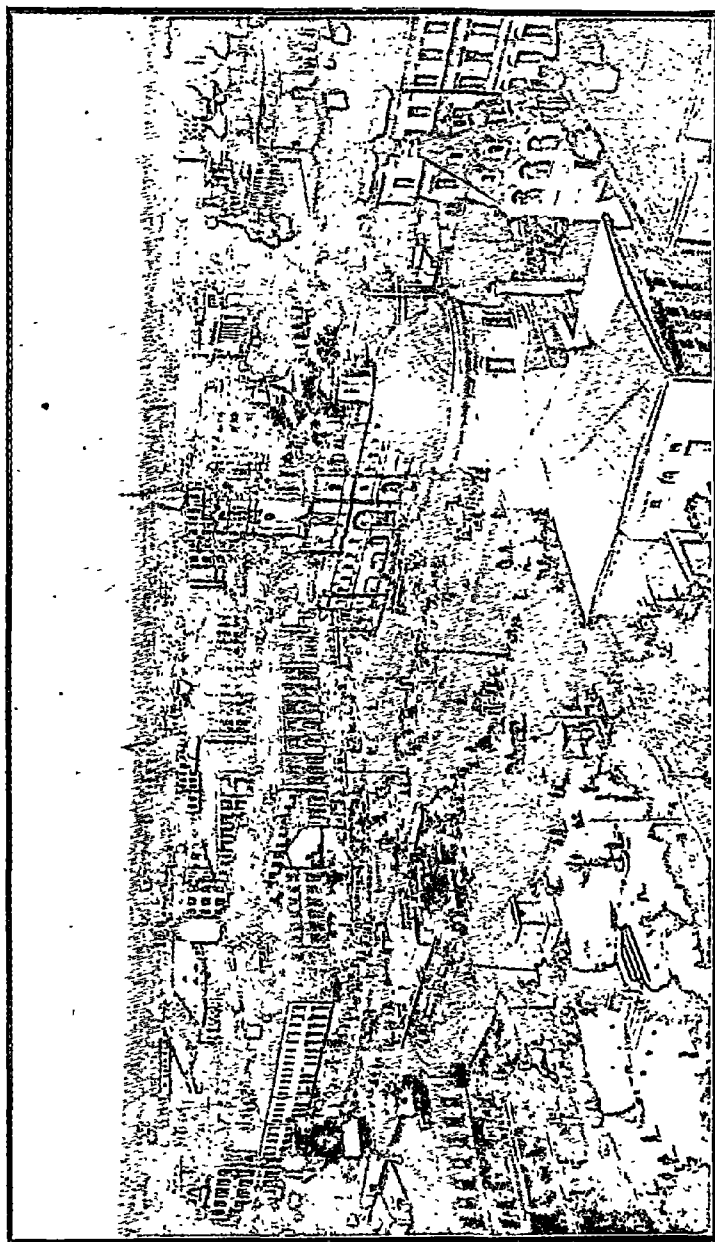
distinction of sex, to all citizens of the State who wish to work the land either with their own families or in other forms of association, and only as long as they are capable of working. Hiring of labor is prohibited." The peasant thus got the land and was freed from the debt on the land and from yearly rents to landlords. Some of the big estates were taken over by the State and made into model farms. Distribution of land amongst the peasantry was left to the village communes.

The old practice of communes holding land made nationalisation easier than it otherwise would have been. This however often meant that the farmer lived far from the land and so the farmer had to migrate to his fields during the working season. The women-folk help in the fields in summer. In winter they keep busy by spinning, knitting and sewing.

The early decrees totally prevented the transference of the right to use land. But in spite of this all manner of illegal renting grew up. In 1922 the law was changed and renting for a fixed small period was permitted. Hiring of labour continued to be forbidden. Even this did not bring



The Lenin Mausoleum in the Red Square, Moscow



The Strastnaia Square, Moscow

sufficient relief as large numbers of families had no horses or other animals to do the work. So a further change was made in 1926. The period for renting was increased and hiring labor on such rented land was permitted, subject to certain conditions. All rental contracts must be registered with the local authorities and the working members of the family of the renter must work on the land, though they may hire labour to assist them. Hired labourers must be treated as regards food and lodging as members of the family. There are a number of other conditions regulating the renting of land and the hiring of labour.

The peasant pays one tax to the State—the agricultural tax. This is so arranged that the richer peasant pays not only more proportionately but the rate is an increasing one. On the other hand a large number of the poor peasants are wholly exempt from taxation on the ground that their income is too little and their standards of life too low to permit of further deterioration by taxation. They thus hold the land without paying anything for it. Till last year this exemption applied to twenty-five per

cent of peasant farms. On the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, the government announced that they proposed to extend this exemption to a further ten per cent. In addition a proposal was made to give state pensions to aged people among the poorer peasants.

Russia is very poor and there is nothing it wants so much as money for education, agricultural development and industrial expansion. It is curious therefore that in spite of this demand for money tax exemptions should be increased. The Communist Party Congress of 1926 stated that they refused to regard the peasant merely as an object of taxation. Excessive taxes and the increasing of retail prices would inevitably stop the progress of the productive power of the village and diminish the commodities of agriculture.

The average tax per peasant household in 1924-25 was 14.2 roubles; in 1925-26 it was 9.3 roubles, and in 1926-27 it was 11.9 roubles. (1 rouble = 10 roubles). The tax is based on the area of arable land, varied by the number of members of the family. Live stock is treated as parts of an acre for purposes of taxation. The tax is a

steeply graded one. Thus for incomes up to 150 roubles it is 4.75 per cent ; to 200 roubles 5.25 per cent ; to 300 roubles 5.75 per cent ; to 400 roubles 8 per cent ; to 600 roubles 10.5 per cent ; and over 600 roubles 14 per cent.

A considerable part of the agricultural tax is spent on local needs. In 1925-26 the tax yielded 235 million roubles. Out of this roughly 100 roubles were spent locally. The tax is thus meant to cover both local and national budgets. It is interesting to find however that many villages all over the country raise voluntary taxes for their own needs. This voluntary tax sometimes is as high as 35 per cent of the agricultural tax, and in one instance was reported to be 70 per cent of it.

Soon after the Revolution large numbers of communes sprang up. Groups of workers organised themselves into little communities to work on the land together and live a common life. Many religious groups did likewise. But in spite of its great initial success the movement dwindled, chiefly on account of friction on matters of detail. It was replaced gradually by the "artel" which was an associa-

tion of peasants who pooled their resources and cultivated a common plot of land. Later came other forms of co-operative use of land known as "collectives".

The great advantage of these collective forms of cultivation is the use of machinery, tractors and the like, which are utterly out of the reach of the individual peasant. The tractor is almost a god in Russia to-day and it is the tractor that has led people to large scale co-operation on the land.

Agricultural banks and credit societies have been extensively organised and there are many facilities for obtaining credit. There were in 1926 over four million two hundred thousand members of these societies. Help is given by the State through these societies in the form of loans of money for capital, or loans of seeds, or by deferring payments on machinery. Co-operative societies of other kinds, consumers and agricultural, have also spread remarkably.

The Soviet government is making every effort to induce families to migrate from the over crowded areas to other parts of the country. Facilities in land and railway fares and loans and temporary exemp-

tion from taxation are offered to those who migrate.

Cottage industries used to flourish in Russia and several million men and women were engaged in them. The number decreased greatly during and after the war but they are again increasing. They are being encouraged in every way and such taxes as were a hindrance to them have been removed. This home industry is specially useful in the winter months when there is little else to be done. Clothing boots, tinware, wooden goods and many other things are thus made by hand or by simple machinery.

I have referred elsewhere in the course of these articles to the Peasants' Houses or Institutes and to the many other activities of the peasantry. They have their newspapers and country fairs and academies and sanatoria; their libraries and reading rooms and women's clubs. The Society for the Liquidation of Illiteracy and Mutual Aid Societies are to be found everywhere. And so are the youth organisations—the Pioneers and the Komsomols.

Great changes have taken place in the economy of the village in Russia and the

church has lost its pre-eminent position. But still it continues to be a centre of activities and the church holidays are celebrated with feasting and festivity. Civil marriage may be easy but many still crowd the church during the wedding season.

Gradually however the church is being ousted from pride of place by the Narodni Dam, the Peoples House or *Panchayat Ghar*. This usually houses the library and reading room and club and class rooms and theatre. And inevitably there is the Lenin corner, draped in red.     ◻

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CHAPTER XV

WOMEN AND MARRIAGE

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## CHAPTER XV

### WOMEN AND MARRIAGE

"Have they really nationalised women in Russia?" That is, almost invariably, the first question that is asked about Russia. It is not easy to understand what nationalisation of women means. Probably the newspaper correspondents and editors who have taken such pains to spread this particular item of "news" do not themselves know what they write about. At the back of their minds, perhaps, there is an idea of promiscuous sexual intercourse going on all over the Soviet Union. And they must imagine or wish others to imagine that the status of woman has been terribly degraded and she has become a mere chattel for the fulfilment of man's passions.

This is very far from the impression that a visitor to Russia, or even one who reads about her present condition, carries away with him. Whatever other failings the Russian woman of today may have, she is certainly not a chattel or plaything of.

man. She is independent, aggressively so, and refuses to play second fiddle to man.

I was present for a while at a women's conference in Moscow. Krupskaya, the widow of Lenin, was there, and Madame Sun Yat Sen and the aged Clara Zetkin and a large number of women from foreign countries. And all the women from the other countries of Europe who spoke envied their Russian sisters for the social and economic freedom they had won.

The lot of the woman in Russia in old times was certainly not one of equality with man. The law favoured men. The wife was obliged to do what her husband told her. She could not enter any service without her husband's consent. It was almost impossible for her to get a divorce. The daughter could inherit only one-fourteenth part of the inheritance, the remaining thirteen parts going to the son or sons. After marriage the woman's property and money was under her husband's control. In the villages there was abysmal ignorance and, it is said, and supported by many homely Russian sayings, that one of the principal pastimes of the peasant was to beat his wife.

The great war and the civil war that followed broke up many families in Russia. The Soviet government had thus to deal with continually changing conditions. In their early days they legislated for women workers and marriage and in theory at least made woman the equal of man. But much of the legislation remained on paper although it had a powerful effect on changing the mentality of the masses. Lenin, speaking two years after the revolution, said:

“A complete revolution in the legislation affecting women was brought about by the government of the workers in the first months of its existence. The Soviet government has not left a stone unturned of these laws which held women in complete subjection.....We may now say with pride and without any exaggeration that outside of Soviet Russia there is not a country in the world where women have been given full equal rights, where women are not in a humiliating position which is felt specially in every day family life. This was one of our first and most important tasks.....Certainly laws are not enough and we will not for a minute be satisfied

just with decrees.....The legal position of women in Soviet Russia is ideal from the point of view of the foremost countries. But we tell ourselves plainly that this is only the beginning."

The general labour legislation was particularly beneficial to women workers and in addition there were special laws for the protection of women. Among the general regulations may be mentioned the eight hour day, which it is now proposed to reduce to seven hours, yearly holidays, social insurance, pensions for long service, rest homes, sanatorium treatment, prohibition of child labour under fourteen, only four hours work as training from fourteen to sixteen, and six hours from sixteen to eighteen. It must also be remembered that workers' committees in factories and trade unions have considerable authority in regard to workers' conditions. The special laws for the protection of women and motherhood are :

- (i) Employment of women and young persons under 18 in heavy and dangerous industries is prohibited, such as chemical industry and others where workers are

exposed to lead dust.

- (ii) Four months maternity vacation is given to industrial workers and such non-industrial workers whose work involves special strain. Other non-industrial workers get three months' vacation.
- (iii) Night work and overtime for pregnant women is prohibited.
- (iv) A pregnant woman cannot be sent away from the place of her regular work without her consent.
- (v) Nursing mothers are allowed, in addition to the usual intervals, further intervals of not less than half an hour at least every three and a half hours. These intervals are included in working hours and paid for.

It was feared that owing to the privileges given to pregnant women the employer might infringe agreements without proper cause. There is therefore a provision in the law which forbids the discharge of a pregnant woman without the sanction of the labour inspector.

There are also what are called "night sanatoria" for workers who are not ill

enough to leave off work but require care and dieting. They go there after their work and spend the night and their leisure hours there.

The number of women in industry has been growing, though not so fast as the men and there was a tendency to employ them in almost all kinds of work. But latterly there has been a re-action against this and it has been pointed out that "equal rights for women" does not mean the employment of women in some kinds of labour for which they are physically not fitted.

Women occupy the highest positions in the Soviet Union. It was a Russian, Kollontay, who became the world's first woman ambassador. A hundred thousand women were elected to the village soviets in the R. S. F. S. R. and the Ukraine in 1926; and 169 peasant women were members of the All Union Congress of Soviets. Even in backward Siberia there are 8,000 women members of the village soviets, forty five of them being presidents of their soviets. Women have an equal right to the land. There are a million of them working their own land as heads of their households.

There is a special woman's department of the Communist Party known as the "Genotdel," which carries on vigorous activity for women's education and rights. The Genotdel publishes several journals and organises lectures on hygiene, baby welfare, co-operation, politics and like subjects. March 8th is celebrated throughout Russia as International Woman's Day.

The marriage and divorce laws of the Soviet are certainly a great break from old tradition. The problems they had to face were partly similar to those that other countries of Europe and America have to face and were partly the result of the general break up of family life after the wars, and of communist ideology. Other countries like Denmark and Turkey have not dissimilar marriage laws and in the United States of America there is a strong movement for what is called "companionate marriage." Soviet Russia is therefore not different in this respect from many other countries.

But Russia is different in one important respect. Tradition and ancient practice have no value there; indeed there is a tendency to go against them because they

are inseparably connected with a form of society which is a symbol of slavery for the Russians of today. What the ideal of marriage in a communist state should be it is difficult to say for the high priests of the doctrine differ. Many of them are strong believers in the family, but the family would be different from what it is now.

The first Soviet marriage law made marriage a civil ceremony. Religious ceremonies were not prevented and most people continued to have them, specially in the villages. It is curious to notice, however, that even the civil marriage gradually developed a ritual of its own with red draperies and pledges and speeches. Polygamy was prohibited and it was made a criminal offence to conceal a previous marriage at the time of a second. Divorce was free and easy and subject to mutual consent. No community of property was created by marriage, and husband and wife were mutually responsible for each other's support. Illegitimate children were given the same rights as legitimate ones. The husband and wife were permitted to take the name of either as a common name or to keep their own names. Children, after

the age of fourteen, were permitted to decide whether they would take their father's or mother's name and also to decide about their citizenship and religion. The law required the parents to keep their children with them and support them. Adoption was not permitted.

Testamentary disposition of property is only permitted in certain cases and even then only in favour of the legal heirs. Ordinarily the wife and the dependent relatives receive equal portions. If the amount is insufficient to support all having a legal claim, those in greatest need have the first charge on it. The law at first did not permit the wife to inherit more than 10,000 roubles (£ 1000), the State getting the rest. Two years ago this was changed and now inheritance is supposed to be unlimited, but the tax on it increases on an ascending scale. For a sum exceeding 5,00,000 roubles the tax is 90 per cent.

Such were the main provisions of the marriage law some years ago. In 1925, however an attempt was made to change it, but the attempt did not succeed then and was postponed. For many months afterwards the whole of Russia discussed the

proposed changes. Innumerable meetings were held all over the country and newspapers were full of the controversy. Leading communists took opposite sides and the discussions were not lacking in frankness or warmth. Generally the peasants were more conservative than the town people.

One of the principal reasons why the changes were proposed was the existence of a large number of couples, estimated at one hundred thousand, who were living together but had not registered themselves. It was proposed to legalise these marriages. This was vigorously opposed, as were also certain clauses making the whole household liable to pay maintenance to a wife in case the husband was too poor to pay it. The women's organisations were, however, in favour of protecting unregistered marriages.

After long debate the new marriage law was adopted in November, 1926. It stated that "registration of marriage is established with the aim of facilitating the protection of personal and property rights and the interests of the wife and children..... Registration is an indisputable proof of the existence of marriage." Thus registration

was not marriage but the proof of it only, and marriage could take place without it though it might be more difficult to prove it then. The same protection was afforded to registered and unregistered unions but in the latter case definite proof was required by the court that an actual state of marriage existed. If there was an unregistered union there could be no remarriage.

The wife's maintenance was made a charge on the husband's household but only to the extent of the husband's share in it. Divorce was made even simpler, one party being permitted to claim it without the consent of the other. It was pointed out that in spite of this easy divorce the average number of divorces every year were eleven for every ten thousand of the population. This is said to be less than the number in many other countries where divorce is not free. It was also stated that the new law, although apparently removing restrictions on unions, in effect helped to establish monogamy firmly by attaching material responsibility to every relation.

Adoption was permitted by the new law. The old law forbidding adoption had not been a success. There were large

numbers of young orphans who had no one to look after them and were taken as extra hands by peasants and treated like their own children.

The legal marriage age was at first sixteen for girls and eighteen for boys. But, largely at the instance of women, the marriage age for women was also raised to eighteen.

This marriage law applies to the R. S. F. S. R. In the other republics of the Union there are some variations. Thus in White Russia only registered marriages are recognised.

It is difficult to moralise about any matter as ideas of conventional morality differ from age to age and country to country. And conventional morality has suffered a severe set back in Russia. There are many who attach little importance to constancy in married life. But there are also many who are called puritans and who wage unceasing war against sexual laxity of any kind. An eminent professor is the leader of this movement and he has laid it down that continence should be the rule and the sexual act should only be indulged in for the purpose of having children. He

is greatly against birth control. Birth control indeed is not favoured by the State, not because they have any moral objections to it, but because they want the population of Russia to increase.

Many of the well-known leaders of the communists—Lenin, Bukharin, Lunacharsky and others—have expressed great concern at the extremist tendencies on both sides—sexual laxity on the one side and an extreme form of puritanism which frowns even at handshaking and laughter and amusement of any kind, on the other. Their emphasis has been on the side of restraint and they have denounced indulgence of all kinds, sexual, in alcohol and in tobacco.

Lenin discussed these matters in an interview with Clara Zetkin in 1920. He said that his alarm had forced him to speak. "Our future generation disturbs me deeply. They are a part of the revolution. And if the evil manifestations of bourgeois society begin to appear in the revolutionary world—as the widely flowering roots of certain weeds—then it is better to take measures against them in time." Further he said that: "The changed attitude of

the young to questions of sex life are of course on grounds of 'principle' and based on theory. Many call their position 'revolutionary' and 'communistic.' They sincerely think it is so. But that does not impress this fellow. Although I am less than any one a gloomy ascetic, this so-called 'new sex-life' of the young, and often the older ones too, often seems to be entirely bourgeois, just another form of the bourgeois house of prostitution." Referring to the theory that the satisfaction of the sex impulse and the demands of love should be as simple and inconsequential as the drinking of a glass of water, he says: "Certainly thirst must be satisfied. But does a normal person, under normal conditions, lie in the street and drink from mud puddles? Or even from a glass that dozens of other people have been drinking from? But still more important is the social aspect of it. Drinking water is an individual matter. But two participate in love, and from it arises a third, new life. Here the interests of society come in, the duty to the collective must be considered.

"I don't for a minute want to preach asceticism. Communism must bring the

joy of life and vigour which comes from the completeness of the love life. The excess in sex-life so often observed at the present time does not, in my opinion, bring with it joy of life and vigour, but on the contrary, lessens them. In time of revolution this is bad, very bad.

" Youth needs healthy sport, swimming, excursions, physical training of all kinds, a variety of mental interest—study, investigation, scientific research—a sound body makes a sound mind. We want neither monks nor Don Juans, nor yet the German philistine as the happy medium. "

To combat these unhealthy tendencies which troubled Lenin a special effort is being made to carry on propaganda on the dangers of sexual indulgence and venereal disease. The sport and physical culture movement is also being encouraged and has spread very fast. Prostitution is also being combated vigorously. The Communist Party has a rule that any member of the Party having relations with a prostitute shall be expelled from the party.

But more than these devices of lecture and propaganda it is hoped that the new conditions of life will teach restraint and

divert attention to other interests of life. Laxity and indulgence flourish in a wealthy leisure class which has little to do and takes to sex to escape from *ennui* and boredom. And this leisure class being the model, to be admired and looked up to, sets the fashion to the other classes below. In Russia this class has disappeared and few people have the time to think of much else than their work and their many other occupations.

In Moscow there stands the great Palace of Motherhood on the river bank. It has a fine exhibition of everything that relates to the health of the mother and the child. It carries on research for the fight against disease and mortality and trains and sends out doctors, midwives and nurses. Beautiful paintings and posters carry its message to the distant villages and teach the father how to treat the mother, and the mother how to treat the baby, and both how to have a pleasant and clean home and healthy children. They teach the mother specially to feed the baby at her own breasts. A poster represents a little calf looking with reproach in its eyes at a baby drinking milk out of a bottle and

asking: "Why do you drink *my* mother's milk?"

The Department of Motherhood and Infancy is in charge of all the work concerning mothers and babies. It has started thousands of day nurseries in the villages. The peasants themselves contributed through their organisations 650000 roubles for these nurseries in 1926. The number of nurseries increases rapidly as the peasants get to know them and appreciate their benefits.

But the Soviet Union is a vast area and all this change and improvement great as it is, has, but touched the fringe of it. Most of the men and women are, as everywhere else, conservative and suspicious of new-fangled notions. Still, the new order has cut deep into the ancient soil and in Turkestan and Yakutsk and Azerbaijan, where women till lately sat secluded behind the veil, women today sit as the equals of men in the council chambers of the republics.



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## CHAPTER XVI

RUSSIA AND INDIA

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## CHAPTER XVI

### RUSSIA AND INDIA

I have endeavoured in these articles to touch on some aspects of present day Russia. I have done so very superficially, for I do not claim special knowledge, and I have not considered here many subjects of exceeding interest. Nor have I considered the future prospects of the Soviet Union, and whether it will retain its aggressively communist character or gradually develop a system more in harmony with that of its neighbours. Soon after the revolution Lenin wrote: "The outstanding achievement of the Revolution has been that Russia, by her political system, has in a few months overtaken the progressive countries. But this is not enough, the struggle admits of no compromise: it is either to fail, or to overtake and even to surpass the progressive countries economically as well.....Either to go under or to move forward at full steam. Thus has the question been put by History."

The struggle is indeed continuing but the period of militant communism is already over and the gentler methods of diplomacy are now being used more and more. Some people say that inspite of the desire of the communists to have a classless society new classes are gradually being formed in the Union. Whatever the future may bring, however, it may be said today that in spite of minor changes the struggle admits of no compromise. As Lenin said, Russia will either go under or move forward at full steam. A middle course seems hardly likely. And ten years have shown that Russia refuses to go under.

These are some of the questions which must interest the student of world affairs and politics and economics and history. The dynamic forces released by the revolution of 1917 have not played themselves out. They have made history and they will continue to make history and no man can afford to ignore them. We in India can least of all be indifferent to them. Russia is our neighbour, a giant sprawling half over Asia and Europe, and between such neighbours there can be either amity or enmity. Indifference is out of the

question.

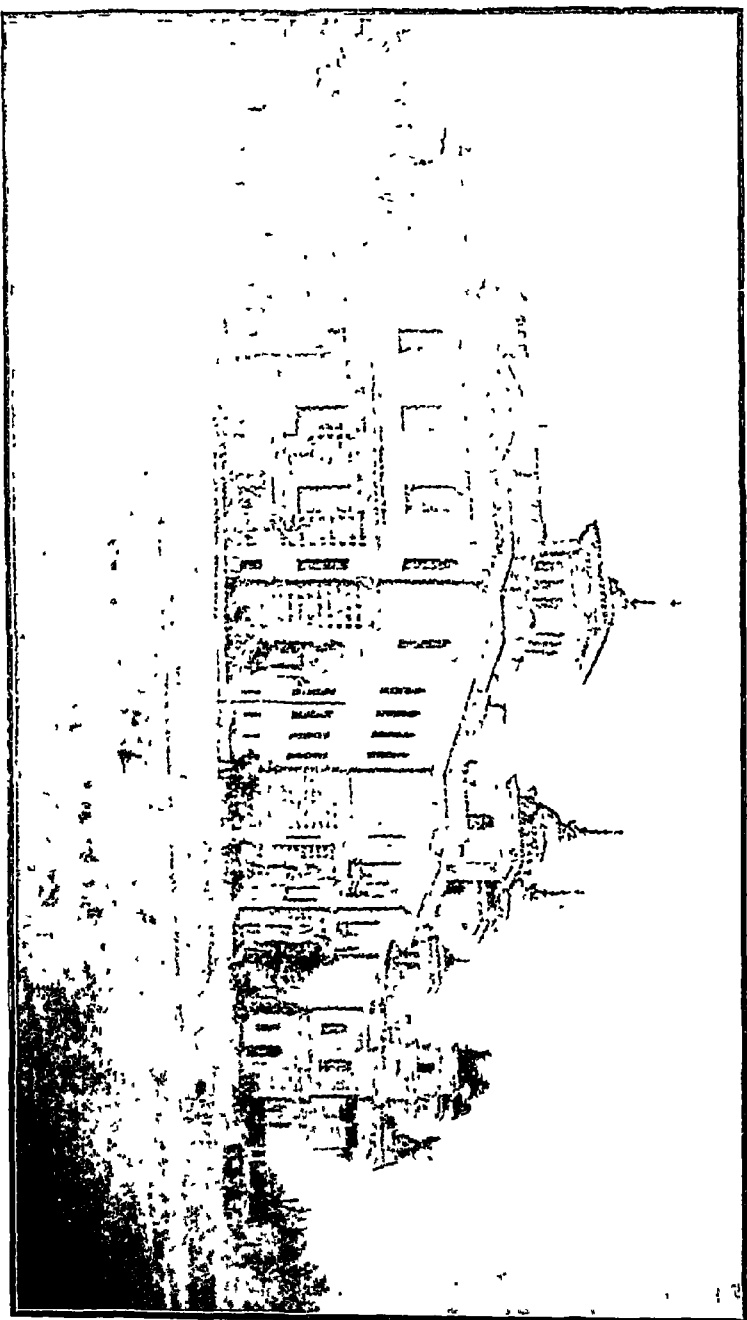
We have grown up in the tradition, carefully nurtured by England, of hostility to Russia. For long years past the bogey of a Russian invasion has been held up to us and has been made the excuse of vast expenditure on our armaments. In the days of the Tsar we were told that the imperialism of Russia was for ever driving south, coveting an outlet to the sea, or may be India itself. The Tsar has gone but the rivalry between England and Russia continues and we are now told that India is threatened by the Soviet Government.

How far is this true? There can be no doubt that there is intense antagonism between British Imperial policy and Soviet Russia, and such antagonism often leads to war. Thus the danger of war is real. But will this war be of Russia's seeking or does England desire to precipitate an armed conflict?

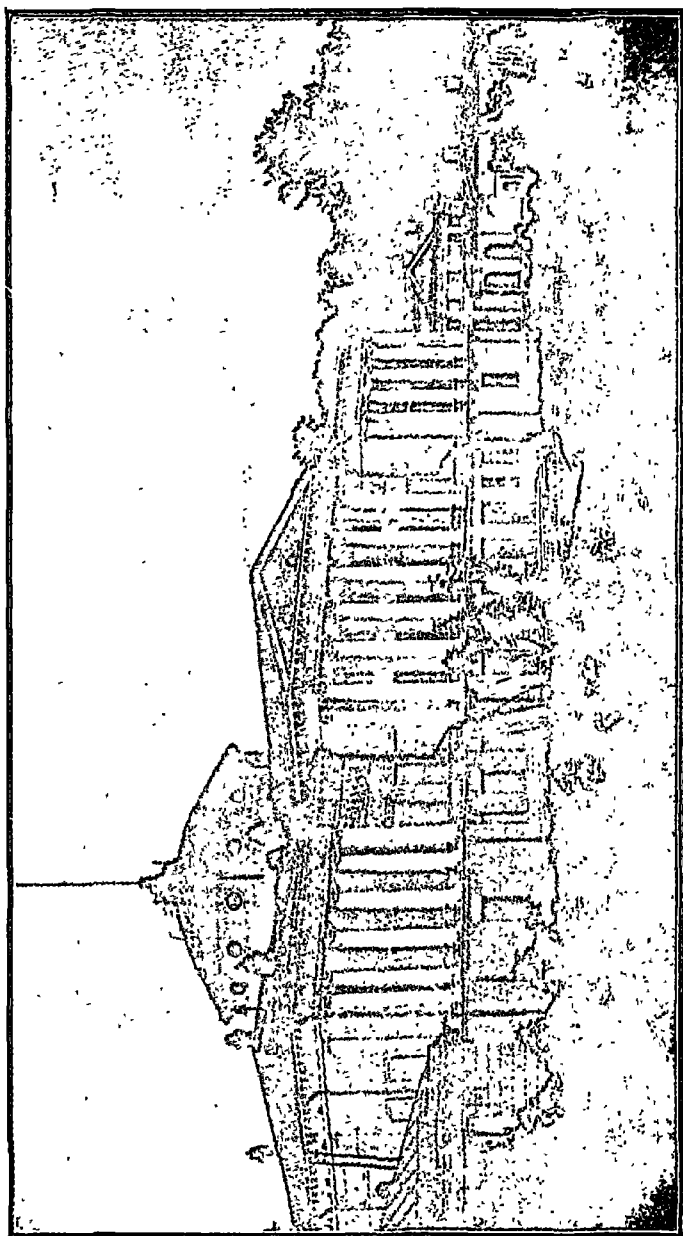
Russia has only recently passed through a period of international war and civil war, of famine and blockade, and above everything she desires peace to consolidate her economic position and build up on a sure foundation her new order of society.

She has already attained a large measure of success and is working at high pressure and with "full steam" to develop peacefully her vast territories. War, even successful war, must put a stop to this process of consolidation and development, and is bound to delay indefinitely the full establishment of her new social order. She cannot welcome this. And so we have seen in the past few years that she has refused to be drawn into an armed conflict in spite of great provocation and insult. In China, largely it is said at the instigation of England and some other powers, her embassy was raided and her ambassador grossly insulted; in England the Arcos raid would ordinarily have been considered a sufficient *casus belli*. Her ambassadors have been shot down in cold blood and her diplomatic agents imprisoned and humiliated. But Russia has succeeded in avoiding war even at the cost of having to swallow her anger and resentment. To every student of recent history it is clear that Russia does not want war.

England on the other hand is notoriously preparing for war and refuses to agree to any effective scheme for disarmament.



The old Pavilion on the race course, Moscow



The Ostankino Palace—A Museum in Moscow

ment or compulsory arbitration. Her attitude in the League of Nations has been one of frank and unabashed opposition to all such proposals. She will not suffer her empire to be included in any such scheme nor her imperial policy to be affected in any way. Only a few days ago she gave yet another instance of her determination not to loosen her grip on her empire in any way or change her aggressive imperialist policy for the sake of ensuring world peace. England's answer to the United States proposal for the outlawry of war has been the hardest and most uncompromising in spite of the fine phrases in which it is wrapped. England is prepared to agree to any peace proposal, it practically says, subject to her having the right to fight for her imperial policy and adventures! A strange acceptance. The actual words of the British note to the States are:

"There are certain regions of the world, the welfare and integrity of which constitute a special and vital interest for our peace and safety. His Majesty's Government have been at pains to make it clear in the past that interference with these regions cannot be

suffered. Their protection against attack is to the British Empire a measure of self-defence. It must be clearly understood that His Majesty's Government in Great Britain accept the new treaty on the distinct understanding that it does not prejudice their freedom of action in this respect."

This in plain language means that the British government retain full freedom to wage war when and where they will. But as if this was not enough, the British note makes a further reservation. It suggests that the treaty should not be universally applicable "for there are some states whose governments have not yet been universally recognised." Every school boy knows that the principal state in the world whose government has not yet been universally recognised is Soviet Russia. Thus England, after taking away by various reservations and qualifications all the effectiveness from the proposed treaty for the "unqualified renunciation of war," as the American note put it, actually makes an exception of war against Russia. The unabashed frankness of these reservations and this exception is a little surprising but they are

in full keeping with British policy. The whole basis of this policy has been to encircle Russia by pacts and alliances and ultimately to crush her. England has worked unceasingly for this end and has made the League of Nations an instrument of her policy. Locarno was the result of this policy and the occasional flounders of England with Germany have also the isolation of Russia for their object. "Angur," the well-known spokesman of the British Foreign office, tells us candidly in his recent book that the growth of the League of Nations and the spirit of the Locarno pact are expressions of a desire to combat bolshevism. "It is the rigidity of the present British Government" he writes, "which builds up the wall of a united Europe against them (the Soviet Union)."

Thus it is absolutely clear from the official utterances and policy of British politicians that they eagerly desire a conflict with Russia and prepare for it and only await a suitable opportunity to wage open war. Many of the other great capitalist countries are equally opposed to the social theories and practices of Soviet Russia and they have no special political animus

against her. It is only "the rigidity of the present British Government" that seeks to encircle and strangle Russia. It is equally clear that Russia eagerly desires to avoid war, but apprehensive of the dangers that threaten her she prepares for it, for she will not easily forego the freedom she has achieved at the cost of tremendous effort and sacrifice.

It is inconceivable that Russia in her present condition at least and for a long time to come will threaten India. She can desire no additional territory and even if she did the risks are too great for her. She is still mainly an agricultural country trying to develop her industries. For this she requires capital and expert knowledge. She gets neither from India. She produces raw material in abundance and not manufactured articles for export and dumping in foreign countries. So does India. The two countries are today too similar to be exploited by each other and there can be no economic motive for Russia to covet India.

Ordinarily Russia and India should live as the best of neighbours with the fewest points of friction. The continual friction





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that we see today is between England and Russia not between India and Russia. Is there any reason why we in India should inherit the age long rivalry of England against Russia? That is based on the greed and covetousness of British imperialism and our interests surely lie in ending this imperialism and not in supporting and strengthening it.

Indians have for generations been told to fear Russia and it is perhaps a little difficult to exorcise this fear today. But if we face the facts we can only come to one conclusion and that is that India has nothing to fear from Russia. And having come to this conclusion we must make it clear that we shall not permit ourselves to be used as pawns in England's imperial game to be moved hither and thither for her benefit. We must continually proclaim, in the words of the Madras Congress resolution, "that in the event of the British Government embarking on any warlike adventure and endeavouring to exploit India in it for the furtherance of their imperialist aims, it will be the duty of the people of India to refuse to take any part in such a war or to co-operate with them in any

## S O V I E T   R U S S I A

way whatsoever." And if this declaration is made repeatedly and emphatically it may be that England may hesitate to embark on this adventure and India and the world may be spared the horrors of another great war.